

Building Literacy Strategies in a Freshman English Classroom

by

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ABSTRACT

An unrelenting need exists to improve literacy instruction in secondary schools in the United States. Reading scores, especially among minority and language minority students, as well as the economically disadvantaged, have not produced significant gains in recent years. The problem of low level reading skills in secondary grades is complicated to address, however, as many secondary teachers find themselves ill-equipped to deal with the challenges they face.

Improving student achievement by integrating reading comprehension strategies into the freshman English curriculum was the ultimate goal of this innovation. A total of 15 freshman English language arts teachers and 30 freshman students participated in this 14 week action research study, which involved teaching explicit pre-, during-, and post-reading strategies during daily lessons at a large, urban high school in the Southwestern United States. Data were collected using a reading diagnostic test, focus group interviews with teachers, individual interviews with teachers and students, and teacher observations.

Findings from the data suggest that professional development designed to infuse comprehension strategies through collaborative inquiry among English language arts teachers contributed to assisting students to perform better on reading diagnostic measures. Furthermore, the findings suggest that this method of professional development served to raise teachers' self-efficacy regarding literacy instruction, which, in turn, improved students' efficacy and performance as readers.

DEDICATION

To me, the definition of family runs much deeper than simply those related by blood. Family is people who love and support you, and who will stand by you when everything around you goes to hell. Family is people who, at times, know you better than you know yourself, and who can look beyond the hard-as-stone exterior and see the vulnerability that hides inside. Family is those people who do for you and for whom you do, without a second thought. Family is those people who love you the most and who you love more than anything in the world. Family is everything.

I dedicate this dissertation to my family, without whom this journey would have never been possible. I cannot write words that express the overwhelming gratitude I feel for them, but I trust they understand. They always do.

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Chapter 1

CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

The ability to not only decode but to comprehend or understand a written text is the cornerstone of success for high school students, no matter the location or demographic of the school they attend or the subjects they study. As an English teacher at Encanto High School¹, an urban, Title One high school in central Phoenix, I believe teaching foundational reading comprehension strategies in freshman English classes is paramount to improve students' overall performance across curriculum.

An unrelenting need exists to improve literacy instruction in secondary schools in the United States. Approximately half of incoming ninth grade students in high poverty, urban high schools read below a sixth or seventh grade level, and assessment data suggest that “adolescents today read no better, and perhaps marginally worse, than a generation ago” (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008, p. 42). Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, the concern for the reading proficiency of U.S. adolescents has grown. The report stated that “about 13 percent of all 17-year-olds in the United States [could] be considered functionally illiterate” and that “functional illiteracy among minority youth may run as high as 40 percent” (as cited in Jacobs, 2008). The implications of this data were far reaching, leading to the conclusion that these adolescents were unable to write a persuasive essay, solve multi-step mathematics problems, and draw inferences from a text (Jacobs, 2008). The low achievement in U.S. secondary schools has caught the attention of policy makers in recent years due, in part, to international comparative data, such as results from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), which

¹ All local names are pseudonyms.

show that U.S. students compare much lower to their international counterparts in grades eight and ten, despite the fact that the need for higher level literacy has grown (Snow, Martin, & Berman, 2008). The accountability focus of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has allowed many other indicators of poor achievement to also be made public, including high rates of low proficiency on state reading assessments (Snow et al., 2008).

The calls for education reform in the years that followed *A Nation at Risk* did not go unanswered, and various programs have been put into place since its publication, with NCLB and the standards movement being among the most recent (Blake, 2008). Still, students in secondary grades continue to struggle to read and comprehend texts. Reading scores, especially among minority and language minority students, as well as the economically disadvantaged, have not produced significant gains in recent years. Data collected in 2009 by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, also known as the Nation's Report Card) show that reading scores of elementary students, specifically in the fourth grade, have increased in recent years but the reading achievements of secondary students have remained relatively flat since the early 1970's, with no significant overall gains or losses in both the general population and those sampled from racial/ethnic groups (NCES, 2010). Little monetary investment has been made in literacy education for secondary students. Today more than two-thirds of eighth and twelfth grade students read at a less than proficient level. More than half of those students score at levels below what the U.S. Department of Education defines as most basic (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). In Arizona specifically, only about one in four students in grades four through eight has achieved grade level skills or proficiency in reading, and the achievement gap between poor and minority students compared to their

white counterparts is significant, with Latino students scoring 24 points lower than their white peers (NCES, 2010). Based upon the 2009 findings, Arizona's eighth graders remain four points behind the national average in reading, placing Arizona 41st among states and the District of Columbia (NCES, 2010). The task for educators at any grade level is daunting, but the problems faced by secondary teachers in urban high schools with high minority populations is especially challenging. Students with low level reading skills struggle to "extract and construct meaning through interaction and involvement with written language" (Snow, 2002, p. 11), which has implications reaching far beyond the confines of a high school campus. Literacy skills contribute to student achievement across the curriculum, as well as prepare students to enter college classrooms and the workforce. This has drawn an increased focus on literacy interventions in secondary schools, where middle and high school teachers attempt to raise achievement in content area classes populated by students whose reading skills fall far below grade level. In today's economy, even entry-level jobs demand the ability to read and write and to think critically, and the responsibility among educators to provide students with the tools to achieve high level mastery of literacy skills has never been greater (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). The problem of low level reading skills in secondary grades is complicated to address, however, as many secondary teachers find themselves ill-equipped to deal with the challenges they face.

Improving student achievement by integrating reading comprehension strategies into the freshman English curriculum is my ultimate goal. More than 80% of Encanto High School freshman enter reading below grade level – many of them reading at an elementary grade level, according to the English department instructional leader

(personal communication, June 21, 2011). Many of these students complete a two period block reading intervention class, but data from the Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) indicate this is not sufficient to raise the literacy levels of our student body. In the spring of 2011, 65% of Encanto High School students, grades ten and above, had passed the reading portion of the AIMS test, which is a drop of 8% from 2010 and slightly better than the 61% of students who had passed the AIMS reading in 2009. By itself, the reading intervention program currently in place is not enough to adequately improve the reading comprehension skills of students whose needs are so great.

During the last decade, the district has made some effort to improve reading comprehension across content areas. In the fall of 2002, the district mandated all teachers use the district-designed Guided Reading Organizer (GRO) no fewer than four times per semester. The GRO was a graphic organizer students completed during reading of an academic text with their teachers' assistance. This initiative met with resistance and most gave little regard to the usefulness of this tool. The following year, the requirement was revised to state that teachers must utilize a guided reading activity (GRA) of any type at least four times per semester and document their use of GRA's and submit this documentation to campus leadership. Little professional development was provided for the proper use of these tools, and there was no follow-through regarding the use of either the GRO or GRA. English teachers in the district were insulted that these requirements had been placed upon them, since most felt they were using this type of strategy on a regular basis in their classrooms. Teachers of other disciplines grumbled at the mandate they teach reading skills, since they felt it neither their place nor their responsibility to do

so. Two years after its initial role out, talk of the GRO and GRA ceased and quickly faded into the background of forgotten initiatives.

As the graduation requirements began to increase in rigor, individual campuses worked to improve AIMS test scores in the areas of reading and writing. English departments on all campuses adopted test preparation materials from various sources, including ACT, and teachers were encouraged not to teach to the test, but to begin practice in reading comprehension strategies that would aid students in passing AIMS reading and writing. English teachers felt burdened by this mandate since they were already expected to teach a packed curriculum. They bristled that teachers of other content areas considered it the sole responsibility of the English department to augment reading instruction that was to occur outside of reading classrooms. Once again, little professional development or guidance was given to adequately teach comprehension strategies. English departments resented that this initiative rested on the shoulders of English teachers rather than campuses adopting reading comprehension practice across content areas.

By the spring of 2011, AIMS reading scores at Encanto High School remained relatively unchanged, and the state of Arizona no longer allowed AIMS test scores to be augmented with grades from students' coursework. This change caused a drop in the schools' graduation rates, which, in turn, affected the publicized performance ratings all schools receive. Encanto High School's principal reached out to his teachers and pleaded for any and all suggestions to raise reading scores and supplement the efforts being made by the school's reading teachers. The English department did its best to answer the call, and the administration asked teachers in the department to increase reading

comprehension strategy teaching in their lessons. However, like the efforts of the GRO and GRA ten years prior, this initiative was unstructured and unmonitored, and no noticeable achievement gains were noted. As such, I concluded that as a freshman English teacher, my colleagues and I, might attain noticeable gains in our students' reading comprehension abilities by adopting a semi-structured plan that would incorporate the regular teaching of specific reading comprehension strategies as part of our scope and sequence.

Supporting the efforts made in the reading classes was necessary to make real improvements in students' reading comprehension abilities. Freshmen who enter the district reading at a seventh grade level or below enroll in a two-period block reading class, in addition to a regular freshman English class. Reading classes use Scholastic's READ 180 program and are taught by teachers who hold a reading endorsement on their Arizona teaching certificate. Many of these reading teachers taught other content area classes prior to earning their reading endorsements and have backgrounds that vary from science to special education. Efforts have been made in recent years at Encanto High School to better communicate students' reading abilities from the reading department to the English department, but little collaboration occurs between teachers of these disciplines. Still, after a year in the program, many students exit their freshman reading classes having made significant gains in their abilities to decode and, to an extent, comprehend. Unfortunately, those gains are seldom reinforced by content area teachers in English language arts or any other subject area, and students' progress is tabled.

During the fall of 2012, I began teaching explicit reading comprehension strategies in my freshman English classes. I chose strategies I felt would best align with

the curriculum of the READ 180 program in order to supplement the progress students made in their reading classes. More than 70% of my students entered the class reading below the seventh grade level, according to the assessments given to them prior to their enrollment at Encanto High School as well as the reading test administered to all students in their English classes in August of the 2012-2013 school year. Three additional freshman English teachers at Encanto agreed to teach the same strategies to their freshman students in order to provide a baseline of comparison and evidence of this innovation's degree of success. The intent was not to improve our students' ability to decode a text, since they were already learning many of these decoding strategies in their reading classes, but rather their ability to understand it.

Theoretical Framework

While seeking insight to the problem of students at Encanto High School lacking reading comprehension skills, and to develop an innovative approach to address this problem, I reviewed the situation at hand through the lens of constructivist learning theory. Through this lens, I found awareness, which resulted in the beginning design of an innovation to improve freshman English students' comprehension skills, and, subsequently, their understanding of the texts they are assigned to read.

The foundation of the constructivist theory is oft credited to Jean Piaget who believed that learners construct new knowledge based upon their previous experiences and learn through "their own involvement and action" (Bevevino, Dengel, & Adams, 1999, p. 275). According to the constructivist approach to learning, the teacher's role is to guide students through the process of making sense of the material or topic on their own. Allowing students to create and construct their own understanding rather than

having the teacher construct it for them maximizes the potential for learning since different students build knowledge in different ways (Brooks & Brooks, 1993). When students are given the opportunity to construct their own frames of thought, drawn from their own prior knowledge and experiences, teachers make learning more meaningful (Bevevino, et al., 1999). Constructivist theory also encourages and accepts autonomy among students. It emphasizes the importance of the teacher being willing and able to build upon student responses when making decisions about instructional delivery and strategy, the content being taught, and the activities assigned (Brooks & Brooks, 1993).

The learner, not the teacher, is at the center of the equation in the constructivist classroom; the student's point of view is recognized as important and valuable. In the constructivist perspective, the instructor has a responsibility to create a climate for learning in which students can construct knowledge rather than passively absorb it (Garmston & Wellman, 1994). Providing students with inquiry-based reading strategies allows the opportunity for learners to internalize major concepts and to "express, confront, and analyze preconceptions and misconceptions in an active, nonthreatening way" (Bevevino, et al., 1999, p. 278). Implementing the constructivist approach to teach reading allows students to assume control over their learning. Ultimately, they reach the point that they no longer need to give thought to the implementation of reading strategies when they are tasked with reading a text since the process has become automatic. (Bevevino, et al., 1999). The focus of this project is designed to give students the tools they need in order to comprehend texts they encounter in any English classes, as well as those texts in other disciplines. The strategies students are taught must contain sufficient breadth and depth to be used in a variety of contexts.

Our students are only with us for a short time. Soon they leave the confines of the secondary school classroom and enter into the next phase of their lives, whether it is college or another endeavor. If students are not taught to think for themselves and to construct their own knowledge when they encounter new or unfamiliar information, then as teachers we have done them a disservice. Applying the constructivist approach to teaching reading comprehension provides students with the opportunity to learn *how to learn* to become a better reader, not just in the English language arts classroom or at Encanto High School, but in the other facets of their lives in which reading and understanding are and will be of critical importance. The same is true for teachers. It is ineffective to tell teachers they must teach reading a certain way at all times; instead, teachers must discover what works best for them and the group of students they have during any given school year so they can construct their own path to helping students find success with reading comprehension.

It is easy (and sometimes tempting) to give students the answers to questions or to point out the most salient points or main ideas from reading passages; however, doing so does not allow students to experience inquiry based learning activities or to draw their own conclusions or inferences about a text. In a classroom which embraces the constructivist paradigm, students become expert learners and teachers provide them the tools they need to keep learning (*Concept to Classroom*, 2004). I designed the innovation for this study around the constructivist model in the hopes that students learn to think about and understand the myriad of texts they will encounter on whatever paths they may choose.

Research Questions

This action research study involves a teacher selecting relevant literacy strategies and teaching students to use these cognitive and metacognitive strategies to construct the meaning of a text. When necessary, and to further personalize this instruction, the teacher will selectively invoke other activities and strategies to make sense of the parts which a student or group of students did not understand. The purpose of this study is to examine the contributions of teaching reading comprehension strategies in freshman English classes. This general purpose leads to the following research questions:

1. Overall, what impact does strategy instruction have on freshman English students' performance on reading diagnostic tests and reading achievement measures?
2. How do secondary English language arts teachers select and infuse strategy instruction into their ongoing practices?
3. How do students and teachers respond to the use of strategy instruction in their freshman English classes?
4. What role does regular collaboration among freshman English teachers serve when they attempt to infuse literacy strategies into their classroom practices?

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF SUPPORTING SCHOLARSHIP

Jason reads aloud text from a language arts literature book while his classmates follow along quietly. With good diction and agile decoding skills, this freshman student finishes the selection upon which he has been called to read and is thanked by his teacher for his willingness to participate. Jason smiles, confident he has done a good job with the task. His classmates are impressed at how seemingly effortlessly Jason attacked the text and by how easy it was for them to follow along. When he is subsequently called upon to summarize what he just read in a few concise sentences, Jason stares blankly at the teacher, unable to adequately put into words the gist of the reading he completed only moments before. A mild panic quickly sets in as Jason realizes he retained and understood very little of the text that is still in front of him. While it is true that Jason enjoyed reading to the class and the attention it provided him, his struggles with comprehension remain whether he is reading silently to himself or aloud in a classroom.

Like many students his age, Jason can say words accurately and with prosody. He exhibits fluency. He understands English spelling and pronunciation, and his grasp of phonics is acute enough that he can tackle most texts he encounters in his classes. Jason's problem, however, is not his decoding ability, but rather his lack of reading comprehension strategies – tools that would help Jason determine the *meaning* of the words he reads and the ideas they represent. Jason is not alone. More than 50% of high school graduates enrolled in postsecondary remedial courses remain at risk for life-long literacy deficiencies. These students would benefit greatly from teachers who model and explain reading comprehension strategies, as well as provide guidance and feedback until

students can begin to use them independently (Ness, 2008). Unfortunately, this type of instruction is rare in secondary classrooms, no matter the content area, and secondary curricula seldom include a reading comprehension component of instruction.

The Common Core Standards Initiative (2010) strives to clearly communicate the expectations of students at each grade level, but it does not represent a uniform curriculum. Common Core embeds reading instruction across content areas, but there has been little effort to reorganize high school curriculum to address students' poor reading skills. Instead, the reading needs of high school students go, for the most part, unnoticed. Instead of increasing the rigor in secondary classrooms, high school students are given easier books to read when they complain reading is hard. Instead of addressing reading comprehension strategies across content areas, the burden is usually placed upon the English department. Instead of English teachers teaching their students to become better readers, directives to teach reading in English language arts classes are often ignored. Like teachers of other disciplines, English language arts teachers are faced with the facts that they do not possess adequate training to help students become better readers and they, too, are expected to make their way through the district's mandated curriculum.

In order for students in secondary schools to improve their reading abilities, an attitude shift must occur. Older students who struggle with reading come to high school feeling as though they are already failures. Teachers who see this struggle every day in their classrooms may also feel like failures if they recognize they do not have the proper tools or sufficient training to help their students become better readers. If reading intervention programs at the secondary level are to succeed, students and teachers must work together in order to close these gaps in literacy achievement. The following review

of literature examines the three topics relevant to this dilemma and this current study: (1) the attributes of reading comprehension and reading comprehension strategies, (2) the perception and value of reading comprehension instruction in secondary schools, and (3) the reading comprehension strategies most valuable for freshman English language arts students.

Reading Comprehension:

From a Definition to Teacher Preparedness to Implementation

Clear definitions of reading comprehension are difficult to come by and vary widely among educators and educational policy makers; however, in her report for the RAND Corporation, Snow (2002) defines reading comprehension as “the process of simultaneously extracting and constructing meaning through interaction and involvement with written language” (p. 11). According to Snow, three elements combine to form what we define as comprehension: “The reader who is doing the comprehending, the text that is to be comprehended, and the activity in which comprehension is a part” (p. 11). Equally hard to come by, or at times simply confusing, is the distinction between reading *skills* and reading *strategies*, which are synonymous in the minds of many educators. The terms are often used imprecisely and inconsistently, though educators and researchers both agree them to be central to reading success (Afflerbach, Pearson, & Paris, 2008). Alexander and Judy (1988) define strategies as “goal directed procedures that are planfully or intentionally evoked” and which “aid in the regulation, execution, or evaluation of that task”, suggesting strategies to be deliberate and controlled processes used by readers who consciously strive to find meaning within a text. Reading skills, on the other hand, “are automatic actions that result in decoding and comprehension with

speed, efficiency, and fluency and usually occur without awareness of the components or control involved” (Afflerbach, et al., 2008, p. 368). Thus, it is a reader’s actions, be them deliberate or automatic, which help determine the distinction between skill and strategy.

Both skills and strategies should be promoted to develop reading comprehension, and it is important to note that “the same actions could be either a skill or strategy, depending on the readers’ awareness, control, intention and the specific reading situation” (Afflerbach, et al., 2008, p. 369). Reading comprehension strategies are mental activities performed by proficient readers to understand and make sense of what they read and to apply the knowledge they have gained. Neither the use of strategies or skills guarantees reading success, however, and instructing students “about how and why to use strategies can be quite effective” (Afflerbach, et. al, 2008, p. 369). Reading strategies develop over time and include both cognitive activities, such as searching for specific information and answers within a text and summarizing its salient points, as well as metacognitive activities, such as self-monitoring to construct the meaning of a text and then re-reading or engaging in other activities to make sense of the parts students do not understand. Proficient readers set goals before they read, ask themselves questions as they read, and summarize and reflect after they have read. These readers are often unaware that they use these strategies at all, which, over time, become so automatic they may be deemed skills (Cromley & Azevedo, 2006).

Reading strategies are necessary for reading comprehension across content areas and can be taught in domain specific contexts to allow students the opportunity to learn to read texts more effectively. While the ultimate goal of reading instruction is the development of fluid and automatic skills, teachers must remember that the advancement

of these skills “is often preceded by a period in which the developing reader must be strategic” (Afflerbach, et al., 2008, p. 372). In secondary schools, however, this presents a myriad of challenges, since many secondary teachers resist teaching reading comprehension strategies to their students because of the amount of material they are expected to cover and/or because they feel unprepared and unqualified to do so. Raising the self-efficacy of teachers is imperative if quality instruction of any kind is to occur, notably in the area of reading comprehension. Therefore, a consideration of comprehension instruction in secondary schools does not end with a grasp of the relationship between skills and strategies. Instead, it necessarily spreads to include the current status of instruction in secondary schools, teachers’ willingness and preparedness to include reading instruction within a discipline, and the specific reading comprehension components that hold importance.

The responsibility of reading instruction goes beyond the primary grades, but the literacy needs of adolescents are being marginalized and neglected (Alvermann, 2004; Vacca, 2002). Secondary teachers are often faced with the challenges associated with students entering high school reading below grade level and without the skills necessary to comprehend and apply content area reading material. As previously stated, few resources, monetary and otherwise, are being provided to secondary schools to address these challenges, and teachers struggle to balance content area instruction with the problems of low literacy. Secondary teachers, while perhaps ill prepared and equipped to deal with the reading challenges their students face, provide a vital link between students and required texts. Even so, many secondary teachers feel that teaching reading is not part of their job description, and researchers have shown that “secondary teachers

struggle to implement research-based approaches and literacy models because some of their instructional choices in the current high-stakes testing environment contradict their knowledge about literacy development” (White, Sturtevant, & Dunlap, 2003). They would rather the task fall upon the elementary school teachers who work with students long before they come to high school, or, at best, feel that teaching reading should be confined to remedial reading classes or English language arts classes. English language arts teachers see themselves as literature teachers, however, and typically “do not teach the literacy skills needed for strategic reading” since they, like other content area teachers, focus concepts considered important to their discipline (Lawrence, Rabinowitz, & Perna, 2009). This prevailing attitude is what underpins the resistance literacy initiatives face in secondary schools, and is likely to contribute to the lack of performance gains seen in secondary literacy over the last thirty years. Secondary teachers do not receive a solid foundation of reading instruction as part of their college coursework and might not see the value in teaching reading in all content area classes.

Students learn what their teachers teach, and since curricula which include reading are generally thought to fall within the domain of the elementary school classroom, these skills are not often taught directly in secondary grades (Rasinski, Padak, & McKeon, 2005). Many secondary teachers view reading instruction as an add-on, rather than “a means to promote students’ understanding and retention of content” (Ness, 2009, p. 157). As such, its practice in secondary curriculum can fall by the wayside. While elementary teachers are trained in reading instruction, secondary teachers are typically not taught more than the basics of literacy. As Ness (2008) suggests, however, “explicit reading comprehension instruction can be highly beneficial to students of all

levels” (p. 81). In her study regarding secondary teachers’ attitudes toward reading comprehension, Ness (2009) found that teachers of higher grades understand that their students need to be able to read, but they do not feel comfortable teaching reading because they feel unqualified to do so. In addition to secondary teachers’ belief that they are content area specialists rather than reading instructors, these teachers lacked both the training and the confidence to effectively work with students to build their reading comprehension skills. Ness concludes that these are some of the reasons why the notion of teaching literacy and reading comprehension across content areas is met with resistance in secondary schools.

Ness (2009) also sheds light on the lack of training pre-service teachers receive during their college coursework. Elementary school teachers tend to be generalists and are knowledgeable about literacy as well as a myriad of other subjects and are, perhaps, better trained to teach reading comprehension strategies to their population of learners. Since the 1970’s, most states have required secondary teacher candidates to take at least one course in content area reading instruction, but according to a study by Heller and Greenleaf (2007), relatively little literacy instruction is provided in most content area courses. In general, most secondary teachers continue to define themselves as content area specialists. Data from Ness’s observations of secondary teachers indicate that many secondary teachers do not have a sense of the wide range of possibilities within reading comprehension strategy instruction. In addition, their knowledge of how to teach these strategies is equally narrow, leading to very small percentages of observed instructional minutes spent focused on comprehension of texts. In total, Ness observed less than 3%

of total instruction time devoted to teaching students strategies to read and comprehend the texts presented in class.

Both pre-service and in-service secondary teachers often hold the perception that students should be able to read and write to learn, and they assume that students possess both of those skills when they enter secondary grades. The 2010 NAEP data show this is often not the reality. In order to improve teacher practice of literacy instruction, Obrien, Stewart, and Moje (1995) found a need for culture shift in secondary schools whereby all teachers, regardless of content, see themselves as responsible for teaching students reading comprehension strategies specific to their discipline. If teachers do not feel qualified in this area, however, little reading instruction is likely to take place. Teachers' self-efficacy relates to student achievement because it influences how much effort they put into planning and preparing instruction and how they behave in the classroom (Wasserman, 2009). Secondary English language arts teachers seldom feel qualified to address the reading challenges their students face. Whether they agree with the assumption that their students should be prepared to read and write by the time they reach high school becomes inconsequential if they do not believe they can do anything to improve the reading comprehension levels of their students. Providing English language arts teachers with proper tools to teach reading comprehension affords a first step in improving reading comprehension in the secondary English language arts classroom. The second step involves raising teachers' self-efficacy by imparting the possibility of this type instruction as well as its ease integrating it into pre-existing lessons that align with district curricula.

Literacy Instruction Across Content Areas

As students move out of elementary school and begin to study academic content areas, it becomes clear that reading involves more than the basics of spelling and decoding (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). Reading instruction in content areas such as science and social studies can improve student learning and understanding, but reluctance remains among secondary education teachers to provide explicit reading comprehension instruction in their classrooms (Ness, 2009). Secondary teachers often feel a responsibility to cover content to prepare students for state standardized tests, and they are too consumed with trying to teach students a vast curriculum of content knowledge to provide direct reading instruction. Guidelines in the current environment of high-stakes tests and accountability shape teachers' instructional choices when they choose to teach only content instead of also integrating reading comprehension strategies into their lessons (White, Sturtevant, & Dunlap, 2003). These teachers may recognize the value of teaching reading comprehension strategies but “may fail to see the usefulness of these strategies for meeting their instructional goals” (O’Brien, et. al., 1995, p. 446) and view the strategies as too time consuming and inappropriate for their subjects. In some urban high schools, freshman students are enrolled in a reading intervention class taught by a reading specialist but do not typically receive any additional reading instruction or support in content area classes where reading comprehension strategies could be taught within the context of the curriculum. (O’Brien, 1995)

In their seminal 1974 article, LeBerge and Samuels (as cited in Pikulski & Chard, 2005) argued that human beings are single-channel processors and can only focus and attend to one thing at a time. Since reading is a two-channel process – decoding and

comprehension – for students who have not developed automaticity in their ability to construct meaning, reading becomes a laborious and ineffective activity (Pikulski & Chard, 2005). At Encanto High School, freshmen students who enter reading two years below grade level enroll in Scholastic’s READ 180 program to improve both their decoding and comprehension skills; these students receive 100 minutes of daily reading instruction with a reading teacher. Encanto High School students have shown noticeable gains in their reading skills after completing the one year program, but seldom receive further reading instruction, specifically in the area of comprehension, outside of the reading classroom. In order for students to further their development of reading comprehension, teachers across content areas must reinforce these strategies being taught in the reading classes

As *A Nation at Risk* (1983) suggested thirty years ago, many secondary students are functionally illiterate and struggle in their high school subjects. As a result, many of those students will not graduate without additional intervention and support to increase their reading comprehension skills (Orechovsky, 2010). Few would argue that these students need instruction in reading strategies which could elevate their reading levels and comprehension skills, but disagreements exist as to where this instruction should take place. Currently, the culture of American secondary schools does not support the notion that older students may require literacy instruction through the end of their compulsory education. And while literacy skills remain necessary in English language arts classes, English language arts is a content area similar to science or social studies and separate from reading. Secondary English language arts teachers may feel no more comfortable teaching reading comprehension than their counterparts in other content areas as they

consider literature and, to a certain extent, writing as their content specialty. Literacy skills are not learned in isolation and students will not develop mastery of high end literacy skills in science, math, social studies, or English language arts unless they practice and spend time reading and writing in these disciplines (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007).

Literacy, as defined by Wray (2001), involves the ability to construct and extract meaning from the signs and symbols of a language and “is the ability to read and use written information and to write appropriately for a range of purposes” (p. 12). If schools and teachers wish to improve literacy instruction and reading comprehension skills, they must focus on reading and writing instruction across content areas, specifically in the areas of math, science, English, and social studies (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). Every academic discipline “has its own vocabulary, textual format, stylistic conventions, and ways of understanding, analyzing, interpreting, and responding to words on the page” (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007, p. 8), but it is not common for secondary teachers to address the literacy demands which are specific to their content areas. Strong literacy skills in the early grades do not always transfer to the more complex skills required to comprehend specialized reading material in secondary content area classes, but secondary teachers who provide their students with instruction and strategies for reading comprehension empower those students to take ownership of their learning and motivate them to tackle the various texts with which they are faced (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Lawrence et al., 2009). Of course, in order to achieve the goal of literacy instruction in secondary classrooms, teachers must not only buy into the notion of its importance, but they must also be trained in reading comprehension strategies that are effective and appropriate to

their content areas and easy to integrate into their daily lessons. Solid professional development in the area of content based literacy instruction will not only provide teachers with the skills they need to build the reading comprehension skills of their students, but will also help them to understand that the integration of literacy instruction will not diminish content coverage but will instead improve both comprehension and retention of the material (Ness, 2007).

Teachers of other subjects may feel the English department holds the responsibility to teach reading. However, and as previously mentioned, English language arts teachers often resist teaching reading comprehension strategies just as much as their colleagues in other disciplines and rarely find it to be part of their curriculum. In fact, the Common Core Standards Initiative (2010), which seeks to establish clear benchmarks for language arts and mathematics, does not include reading strategies for grades 9-12, as they require reading instruction across content areas. So while Vacca (2002) argues that the primary responsibility of secondary English language arts teachers is to instruct their students in reading comprehension strategies, the fact remains that this type of instruction is as rare in an English classroom as it is in a mathematics classroom. Vacca goes on to argue that one reason why reading proficiency is not evident across content areas is because English language arts teachers do not place enough emphasis on teaching these strategies. Whether or not the onus of teaching reading comprehension should fall solely upon English teachers is debatable; however, since reading and the study of literary texts are fundamental components to most English language arts curricula, it stands to reason that English teachers can (and should) easily integrate teaching reading comprehension strategies into their daily lessons.

Professional Development through Collaborative Inquiry

As stated previously, content area teachers, including English language arts teachers, may be reluctant to engage in reading comprehension strategy instruction, and may also be reluctant to engage in professional development activities to better their practice. Rather than engage teachers in traditional professional development activities, which dictate methods and practice that have held less than favorable outcomes, I explored a collaborative approach. From this line of inquiry, I learned that effective professional development should “involve the creation of opportunities for teachers to engage as learners, build pedagogical and disciplinary knowledge, and co-construct and enact new visions of practice in context” (Linn, Shear, Bell, & Slotta, 1999; Loucks-Horsley, Hewson, Love, & Stiles, 1998; Putnam & Borko, 2000; Radinsky, Bouillion, Lento, & Gomez, 2001, as cited in Nelson & Slavit, 2008, p. 100). Collaborative inquiry allows teachers to become their own guides down the path of improving their instruction. This level of autonomy aligns with the constructivist approach, which guides this study (Bevevino, et al., 1999).

In a more situated and collaborative approach to professional development, effective professional development must be “grounded in the work teachers do in support of student learning goals, engage teachers in inquiry and reflection, be collaborative, supported, and ongoing, and be meaningfully connected to other school and district initiatives” (Nelson & Slavit, 2008, p. 102). Teachers often work in isolation, and collaboration does not occur naturally under normal circumstances; however, when teachers work together “to pose and answer questions informed by data from their own students, their knowledge grows and their practice changes” (David, 2008). This broader

understanding of professional development encouraged me to build opportunities for the teacher participants in my innovation to work together. Seemingly, this collaboration would support their development of instructional methods and practices, help them merge them with their day-to-day lesson planning and instruction and, in turn, improve their students' reading comprehension abilities

Selecting Reading Comprehension Strategies for Secondary Students

In the previous section, I documented the research that unveils the need and current omission of comprehension instruction in secondary classrooms. I now turn to existing scholarship to identify the reading comprehension strategies appropriate for my innovation.

Several premises guide the use and selection of reading strategies in secondary classrooms. Overall, the needs of individual learners must be considered and a plan put into place that best meets those needs. Specifically, no one strategy should be taught in isolation; rather, a mix of direct, explicit instruction with instructional principles embedded in the content as well as the use of diverse texts and ongoing formative assessment of students is necessary to build literacy skills in secondary students (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). Studies conducted by Cromley and Azevedo (2006) and Çubukçu (2008) conclude that proficient readers use metacognitive strategies to comprehend text. These strategies involve readers setting goals prior to reading, readers asking themselves questions and answering those questions while reading, and reflecting on and summarizing what they read (Cromley & Azevedo, 2006). Conversely, those students who are poor readers “do not monitor their own comprehension and frequently

seem unaware that they are not putting information together in a meaningful way”
(Barclay, 1990, p. 84).

The approach to teaching metacognitive reading strategies is a multistep process and can be categorized into three groups: pre-reading strategies, during reading strategies, and post-reading strategies. In keeping with the constructivist approach to teaching, students should be guided through the reading process, rather than teachers simply conveying the key pieces of information from a text. In this way, students begin to develop effective reading comprehension strategies that will, in time, evolve to reading comprehension skills. Many students, however, do not enter our English language arts classes with these metacognitive skills, and so teachers must scaffold their instruction to help students build these skills in order to guide their future learning. Support of metacognitive activities improves students’ cognitive activities, which in turn improves student achievement (Molenaar, Boxtel, & Slegers, 2010).

The balance between strategies and skills varies based upon the difficulty of the text and the automaticity of the reader to extract and construct meaning. As teachers, it is important that we recognize the strategy-skill connection and position our teaching in the hopes that the reading comprehension strategies we teach our students eventually transition into automatic skills (Afflerbach, et al., 2008).

Teachers must recognize that students will be more likely to understand and retain the content they teach if students possess the necessary tools for developing reading comprehension skills (Ness, 2008). To put this into practice, teachers should recognize that rather than providing struggling readers with interventions based on content, they must explicitly teach “strategies that foster reading independence, engages students in

supported practice with multiple texts, and gradually transfers responsibility for strategy use as students become increasingly able” (Clark & Graves, 2005, p. 576). By guiding students to monitor their own knowledge, they will be more likely to seek help when necessary and will be more likely to achieve success in comprehending their reading (Stavrianopoulos, 2007). English language arts teachers who follow a metacognitive approach to reading and understanding can begin to easily integrate reading instruction into their routines with minimal changes to their daily lesson plans.

Pre-reading Strategies

It is not uncommon for the pre-reading stage of the reading process to be neglected, with teachers citing the lack of time as a major reason for its omission. In addition, and as Ajideh (2003) states, “major emphasis in the past has been on the product rather than the process” with the teacher assuming that the “meaning resides in the reading itself” (p. 6). Pre-reading activities remain an important step in the process, however, as “pre-reading activities motivate students before the actual reading takes place” (Alyousef, 2005, p. 149). Employing pre-reading strategies not only motivates students to *want* to read the required texts, but also prepares them to read it.

One pre-reading strategy involves tapping schema. Not unfamiliar to many teachers is schema theory, which states that in order for students to make sense of, and subsequently comprehend, a text, they must first invoke their prior knowledge (schema) about the topic and relate it to new information that will be presented in the text that students will read (Mihara, 2011). Rather than pre-teaching key vocabulary, as is commonly seen in secondary classrooms, Taglieber, Johnson, and Yarbrough argue in their 1988 study (as cited in Mihara, 2011) that invoking prior knowledge with pre-

questioning and pictorial content is a much more effective strategy for reading comprehension because it helps to fill in the gaps in conceptual knowledge that many students face. In the secondary English language arts classroom, teachers might engage students in a discussion related to the text prior to reading and provide images and ask probing questions in order to not only provide students with background knowledge of the topic but to construct new schema and the build bridges between new and existing knowledge needed for text comprehension (Ajideh, 2003).

Teachers should not presume that students are prepared to read the text. Even if students are familiar with the vocabulary and grammar they will encounter (which they are often not), it is necessary for students to first understand the purpose of what they are reading and then begin to build the knowledge base needed to understand the content of the presented material (Ajideh, 2003). In fact, many of the difficulties learners encounter when reading assigned texts can be attributed to the lack of sufficient prior general knowledge, notably in the cross-cultural environments found in many urban schools (Little & Box, 2011). According to Box and Little (2011), “Research by schema theorists indicates that abstract concepts are best understood after a prior foundation of concrete, relevant information related to the major concepts to be studied has been established” (p. 25). Therefore, schema-based pre-reading activities afford an important step in fostering reading comprehension skills in secondary students. English language arts teachers can easily employ them by adopting one or more of this type of strategy rather than focusing exclusively on pre-reading activities, such as the pre-teaching of vocabulary, that center around “the linguistic difficulties of a text”(Ajideh, 2003, p. 7).

Several options exist for engaging students in the use of schema-based pre-reading activities. The teacher holds a responsibility to remind students of what they already know through review or to build the required knowledge essential for the understanding of new information (Little & Box, 2011). Teachers may stimulate a discussion by introducing a key word, concept, or picture and then questioning students about what comes to mind (Ajideh, 2003). The teacher then records student responses and probes students to explain why they made the associations they did. This interactive process allows students to become aware of the associations they make by sharing and listening to the thoughts and ideas of their peers. By providing this opportunity to students, teachers help their students formulate prior knowledge and, in turn, create a set of expectations appropriate to the content and language of the text (Ajideh, 2003)

The use of graphic organizers or concept maps is another schema-based pre-reading activity that, according to Box and Little (2011), presents “students an overview of the more detailed material being studied” (p. 26). Concept maps and graphic organizers assist students in becoming familiar with vocabulary and concepts they will encounter in the proceeding text by visually linking key ideas to the connections students made. Closely related to concept mapping is semantic mapping, which incorporates the key ideas of schema theory into graphic organizers used during pre-reading activities. Semantic maps are graphic displays of word clusters that are meaningfully related and can be completed as a whole class activity. This allows for the use of students’ collective prior knowledge of a concept. This activity is especially useful for students who do not have sufficient background knowledge of a topic being presented in a text (Box & Little, 2011).

Human memory has been said to follow semantic organization, and “when two or more bits of related information join to form an association, and two or more associations join to form a concept, then the information can be appropriately stored in long-term memory,” making semantic mapping a logical choice for a pre-reading activity (Barclay, 1990, p. 86). Sometimes referred to as “brainstorming,” semantic mapping has other advantages as a pre-reading strategy, among them being the minimal preparation required on the part of the teachers who may already feel their time is limited (Ajideh, 2003). Semantic mapping allows for whole class interaction and provides an opportunity for students to share their own prior knowledge and opinions on a topic without feeling threatened that anything they might share is unacceptable or incorrect since anything can be added to the framework of the semantic map. This framework can then be applied and reinforced immediately during reading. Only after students have been given the opportunity to share their knowledge of a topic does the text become the focus of the class (Ajideh, 2003).

During-reading Strategies

Metacognitive during-reading strategies are also necessary to help students make connections, monitor their understanding of a text, generate questions, and stay focused while reading. The knowledge generated during pre-reading by semantic mapping can also be referred to during reading to emphasize the connections students made during the pre-reading activities and to reinforce the knowledge being built throughout the reading process. Giving close attention to the structure of a text is an important component of during-reading strategies and allows students to further monitor their understanding. Completing graphic organizers while reading to show expository structures such as cause

and effect or chronological order can be an effective during-reading strategy, as well, providing students a better understanding of what might come next or what information they should be looking for while they read (Iwai, 2011). Other metacognitive processes such as self-questioning and predicting should also be used to assist students in becoming active readers, able to construct meaning from a text while they read (Barclay, 1990).

The National Reading Panel found self-questioning to be the most effective during-reading strategy to teach based upon students' observed comprehension gains (Mostwo & Chen, 2009). In self-questioning, the readers pose questions to themselves for the purpose of inferring and retaining the meaning of text. Student are taught to ask themselves a variety of questions while reading, beginning with the basic *who, what, where, when, and why?* and progressing to higher-level questioning, such as *What is the author going to say next? What information is important? How can I paraphrase and summarize this information?* (Pennington, 2009). Self-questioning bolsters metacognitive awareness by helping students to monitor their own comprehension and making them actively process a text. Further, self-questioning activates the reader's schema and "invokes higher-order comprehension processes, such as inferring answers from text already read, or priming the student to notice them in later text, and improves retention" (Mostwo & Chen, 2009, p. 1). This "talking to the text" metacognitive approach improves reading comprehension and causes reading to become a two-way, active process rather than a one-way passive experience (Pennington, 2009).

Predicting is another ongoing, during-reading activity that engages readers by causing their minds to constantly jump ahead in order to figure out what might come next. Using clues from the reading, while at the same time revising and refining old

predictions and to call upon prior knowledge to make inferences, students make educated guesses as to what will happen later in the text (Guisinger, 2011). Similar to self-questioning, students are taught to first preview the text they will be reading in order to activate prior knowledge and to make predictions related to plot, setting, and other literary elements (Bremer, Vaughn, & Clapper, 2002). The teacher models the during-reading predicting strategy by giving students examples of think aloud questions they might ask themselves while reading and may select stopping points in advance where students stop and make their predictions. Study guides or reading logs may also be provided for students to document and revise their predictions as they read the text, and to make note of information they do not understand and questions they would like to address later. Following the completion of the text, the teacher instructs students to consider whether they made correct predictions and guides them to examine the information used make those decisions.

Post-reading Strategies

The importance of teaching students effective post-reading strategies must also be emphasized for building reading comprehension skills in the secondary English language arts classroom. Post-reading activities allow students the opportunity to use and work with the information they just obtained, leading to an increased understanding and retention of a text. While not a great deal of research exists on post-reading strategies, their importance should be stressed as key to reading comprehension. Most post-reading strategies can be used easily following a whole group or individual reading assignment, and allow for both review and clarification of the text and provide students the opportunity to metacognitively consider the knowledge they just gained during reading.

Teaching students to paraphrase what they have just read helps students to find the most important ideas and details in a reading passage. The paraphrasing strategy often referred to by the acronym, RAP (**R**ead a paragraph; **A**sk myself, “What was the main idea and two details?” and **P**ut it into my own words), is based on the theory that utilizing paraphrasing may improve memory of main ideas and details in text (Hagaman & Reid, 2008). To utilize the paraphrasing strategy, teachers direct students to read a paragraph from a selected text and put the ideas gleaned from the reading into their own words and then either share their thoughts orally or direct them to write out their paraphrases for later review. Teachers may guide students through this activity by instructing them to think about what the words mean as they read and to ask themselves to determine the main ideas of each paragraph or section. Teachers also instruct students to look for at least two details related to the main idea in each section of the text.

Developed at the Center for Research on Learning at the University of Kansas, the RAP strategy has been found effective in improving reading skills in middle school and high school students, and according to its developers, improves reading comprehension by 36% (Schumaker, Denton, & Deschler, 1984). The paraphrasing strategy is effective in teaching students to recall main ideas and facts from a text, which is often a skill required at the secondary level, and also helps students check their own comprehension skills as they progress (Dieker & Little, 2005). In their 2008 study, Hagaman and Reid concluded that paraphrasing increased students’ reading comprehension as measured by retell and short answer questions, which suggests this strategy to be effective at improving the comprehension skills of struggling readers.

The teaching of literacy skills does not end with reading, as comprehension can be further extended by writing a response to class readings. Writing activities work to increase the connection students make to texts and allow students an opportunity to further process what they have read and improve their understanding of the material (Stevens, 2003). Asking students to write personal responses, summaries, notes or to answer questions in writing about a text improves their comprehension of texts they read in content area classes such as science, social studies, and English language arts (Graham & Hebert, 2010). Writing can be a means for improving reading and content area learning, as it enhances a student's ability to read fluently and accurately and improves comprehension. The relationship between reading and writing is not mutually exclusive; readers must deal with letter and phonemes if they are to read a text accurately and writers must learn about letters and sounds in order to learn to spell accurately (Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000). Both readers and writers also require knowledge of syntax, as some syntactic structures are found only in written text and must be learned from reading and are necessary to produce coherent writing (Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000). Teaching students about writing (e.g. text structures for writing, paragraph or sentence construction skills, spelling) improves reading comprehension, reading fluency, and word reading skills (Graham & Hebert, 2010). Having students write in extended ways about what they read, such as analysis, interpretation, or personalization, enhances their reading abilities and provides for a better understanding of the text (Graham & Hebert, 2010).

Instruction

Teachers need to help students “make connections across contexts and experiences so they see similarities between content they are learning and their prior

knowledge” (Lawrence, et al., p. 61). The implementation and teaching of the variety of strategies outlined in the previous sections are imperative if students are to master the higher order thinking skills necessary to build the levels of literacy proficiencies needed in the twenty-first century. Students learn when they have a compelling reason to do so, such as a desire to make sense of interesting materials, so it is also important to couple reading comprehension strategies with high interest literature across the various content areas (Heller & Greenleaf, 2007). Secondary teachers, whether or not they realize it, are experts not only in their subjects but also the literacy of their subjects. Literacy skills needed to learn mathematics are different than those needed to learn the content of an English language arts class, so secondary educators must recognize the importance of teaching literacy strategies that have the greatest potential to advance comprehension in their respective discipline (Wray, 2004).

In order to accomplish this, there must first be a paradigm shift in terms of how English language arts teachers view and deliver instruction. In her 2008 study, Ness found that 36% of instruction in secondary classrooms was didactic, or teacher centered. Some teachers in the study concluded that since students struggled to read assigned texts, it was the teacher’s responsibility to simply provide students with the information, rather than allowing them to discover it on their own. As students progress in their education, texts become the primary source of knowledge. Therefore, they must rely upon their own abilities to extract meaning from a variety of text-based sources (Alfassi, 2004). If students do not receive the opportunity to discover information on their own by direct exposure to the text, hands-on learning, or inquiry-based learning, then many will not develop the reading comprehension proficiency they will need when they leave school.

Not all students process and understand a text in the same manner, and therefore teachers cannot dictate when or how students should employ the use of comprehension strategies. Rather, comprehension instruction must be “geared toward teaching students multiple strategies that will allow them to develop a sense of conscious control of their cognitive processes” (Alfassi, 2004, p. 171).

Clearly, students need reading comprehension instruction in their secondary classrooms. Students enter high school unprepared for the reading challenges they face across content areas, and English language arts teachers are at the forefront of helping students build meaning and interpret ideas from the words they read by modeling and explaining these strategies and guiding students to begin to use them independently. English language arts teachers can promote both reading comprehension strategies and skills in their classrooms through the three-pronged approach to reading instruction, which involves pre-, during-, and post-reading strategies.

Since reading instruction in content area classrooms seldom occurs, a shift in teachers’ paradigm must occur before the reading needs of secondary students are met. Teachers must be well versed in effective reading comprehension instruction that can be easily integrated into their daily lesson plans in order to accomplish this. Aligning this instruction with constructivist theory and a metacognitive approach to teaching allows for students to be guided through the reading process so that they will begin to foster reading comprehension strategies that will eventually evolve into reading comprehension skills.

Though the challenges they face may be daunting, secondary English language arts teachers are crucial to improving literacy skills among high school students. Literacy is a far larger concept than simply being able to decode words, and the impact of reading

comprehension strategy instruction could have profound and lasting effects on freshman English students' performance on reading diagnostic tests and other achievement measures. In order for this to be accomplished, however, English language arts teachers must select and infuse strategy instruction into their ongoing practices that is beneficial to students and that integrates easily into their daily lesson plans. The ultimate goal of reading comprehension instruction is to enable students to construct meaning from the texts they encounter. Training teachers to guide students through the reading process and providing them with the tools needed to scaffold their instruction is paramount to helping students build the literacy proficiencies they need to be successful. The innovation linked to this action research project initiates a plan to promote the infusion of appropriate reading strategies into ninth grade English language arts classrooms.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND ANALYSIS

At the school site where this study was conducted, the achievement data collected during the intervention window from September through December 2012 showed that students enter and exit high school reading below grade level. This issue is problematic in every classroom in which reading is an integral component of instruction, and leads to the concern that students are graduating without the reading skills necessary for them to find success in higher education and in the workforce. I designed the innovation for this study to improve students' reading comprehension strategies in the hopes that their mastery of these strategies would lead to improved reading skills and an application to their future coursework and career goals. Accomplishing this goal demanded providing freshman level English language arts teachers with the knowledge of reading strategy instruction that could easily be integrated into daily lesson plans while maintaining autonomy in their teaching.

Methods

This action research study followed a mixed-methods approach to data collection in order to provide more breadth and depth than relying upon a single method approach. Mixed methods inquiry provides the researcher the means to think openly and generate a more complete understanding of the data collected (Greene, 2007). The core characteristics of mixed methods research include collecting both quantitative and qualitative data and integrating the two data sets "with one building on or extending the other" (Sweetman, Badiee, & Creswell, 2010, p. 441). In this action research study, I served as both researcher and participant who collected relevant data and offered the

innovation. In action research, “the main purpose of data collection is to understand the social problem to respond appropriately toward its solution” (Bargal, 2008, p. 20). As a teacher, I was aware of the literacy challenges my students faced, as well as the challenges faced by secondary teachers who possess little to no background in teaching reading. In the spirit of action research, I attempted to find practical solutions to the problems faced by a community of teachers of which I was a part. Therefore, I developed an intervention to improve students’ reading skills and facilitate higher levels of teacher self-efficacy in the area of literacy instruction. I based the intervention’s design upon assessment data which showed the majority of freshman students at Encanto High School entered ninth grade reading below grade level, as well as data collected from a survey instrument given to teachers to measure their levels of efficacy regarding literacy instruction and the administrative support it received at the school-site level. To accomplish this goal, the teacher participants met several times throughout the course of the study and frequently communicated electronically through e-mail in order to review strategy instruction and brainstorm possible integration of techniques. As the research practitioner, I provided each teacher with information and handouts containing explanations and examples of reading strategies they could teach to their students as part of their daily instruction. In the following sections I offer specific information about the method used for this action research. They present the setting, action plan, data sources, data collection, and data analysis.

Setting

The setting for this study was the school site where I served as a teacher in the English department. Encanto High School is a large, ethnically diverse public high

school in Phoenix, AZ. Like many of its urban counterparts, this school has experienced a multitude of ethnic and demographic shifts over its 50 plus year history. Encanto High School is a Title 1 high school, with more than 80% of its students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. The school is located almost directly in the city's center, in the heart of the uptown business district with a socio-economic range of middle-class to high poverty families. It enrolls nearly 2,400 students in grades 9-12. In 2012, the attendance rate was 95.7%, the four year graduation rate was 73%, and the annual dropout rate 3.5%. 65% of the students were Hispanic, 11% were African American, 10% were Anglo, 7% were Native American, and 7% were Asian.

A one-year reading intervention course is provided for freshman students who read two or more grade levels below ninth grade as determined by the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), an assessment designed to measure students' reading level. The SRI uses the Lexile Framework for Reading®, which matches students to text ("Read180 FAQs", 2011). The program utilizes Scholastic's READ 180 curriculum, and nearly 50% of incoming freshman (including general and special education students and English language learners) are enrolled in this 100-minute, two period block reading class. A second year of corrective reading is offered to a limited number of sophomore students who still read significantly below their grade level as determined by students' Lexile level assessed at the end of the READ 180 course. Based on the data collected from the reading assessments given to incoming freshman, the skill level of students enrolled in reading classes varies widely and encompasses students reading from a seventh grade reading level down to a kindergarten grade level. Students who are enrolled in reading

are also enrolled in a traditional freshman English language arts class, as well as freshman level math, science, and physical education courses.

The Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) reading scores had remained relatively flat during the years prior to this study. 61% of students in grades 10 and above had passed the AIMS reading test in the spring of 2012, compared to 54% in 2011 and 62% in 2010. Data from the AIMS reading test caused the school principal to reach out to the faculty of Encanto High School looking for input and suggestions that would improve the reading scores of our students. Prior to this study, Encanto High School had no formal reading intervention in place. Outside of reading classes, school leadership encouraged teachers across content areas to teach reading comprehension strategies in their classrooms, but no specific initiative or mandates had been put in place, and there was no monitoring of teachers to determine whether or not this type of instruction occurred.

Participants

The participants of this study were comprised of general education ninth grade students enrolled in freshman English classes. Teacher participants played two different roles in the study. The general pool of teacher participants were interviewed and surveyed to determine teacher self-efficacy regarding reading comprehension strategy instruction, as well to determine the challenges this type of instruction presented. A subgroup of these participants, referred to henceforth as “innovation participants” were limited to teachers who were teaching at least two sections of freshman English during the time of the study. The teachers in this subgroup worked directly with me to deliver explicit reading comprehension strategy instruction to the student participants.

The teachers. A total of 16 English language arts teachers, including myself, participated in this study. In the general pool, the 15 other participants were all employees of the same high school district that employed me. Their teaching experience ranged from four to 26 years. Of the 15 teachers in the general pool, three had bachelor's degrees, and the remaining 12 held master's degrees.

Five innovation participants, including myself, participated in the strategy innovation. The intent was to increase teachers' use of comprehension strategy instruction and their freshman students' reading comprehension abilities, as demonstrated by their performance on the reading diagnostic test explained later in this section. The innovation participants agreed to collaborate in person and electronically to discuss and decide upon the reading strategies that would be most beneficial to our student population. Each of the innovation participants also committed to infuse explicit reading strategy instruction into their daily teaching. The other three innovation participants played an integral role in determining the success of this innovation by allowing student achievement data to be triangulated across a much larger group of students.

I had taught for ten years before beginning this study, two years at Encanto High School and a total of six years in the district. I held a bachelor of arts degree in journalism and English literature and linguistics, a master of arts degree in TESOL (*teaching English to students of other languages*), and was Arizona state certified as an English teacher with a full ESL endorsement. I was also enrolled as a doctoral student at a local state university. At the time this study was conducted, I taught five sections of freshman inclusion English, which were comprised of a mix of general and special education students. These classes followed an inclusion model of instruction and were

co-taught by a special education teacher who was also certified in English language arts and was one of the general teacher participants in this study. In our inclusion classes, instruction was not modified from the general education curriculum. Assignment requirements for special education students were modified by the co-teacher as necessary, but no special education student participated in this study. I served as the primary instructor for the classes from which data was collected for this study.

The English instructional leader and the school principal supported the implementation of any course of action that might improve my freshman students' reading abilities, but expected that I and the innovation participants continued to teach the Cambridge International curriculum Encanto High School had adopted in 2010. The innovation participants in this study had each taught between five and ten years. All three held a master's degree and one was pursuing an additional master's degree at the time of this study. Beyond the innovation participants, in order to obtain general information about comprehension strategy instruction in English classrooms from a broader range of teachers, I interviewed and surveyed these teachers, along with the 12 additional English language arts teachers from Encanto High School and other schools in the district. To reiterate, I participated in all dimensions of this study as my students' English language arts teacher as well the researcher in this study.

The students. At the time of this study, I taught approximately 65 general education students between the ages of 14 and 15 years old. The three remaining innovation participants collectively taught an additional 150 general education students of the same age range. At the beginning of the 2012-2013 school year, I reviewed the data from the SRI assessment given to incoming freshman, as well as data collected from the 7

Minute Reading Test, a reading skills test given to all grade levels of English language arts students at Encanto High School. The results from these assessments indicated that 85% of my students read below the ninth grade level and slightly more than 70% read at or below a seventh grade level. Then I compared the data generated from my own students with data collected from a similar sampling of freshman students in the three innovation participants' English language arts classes. The data collected for freshman English language arts students in the other innovation participants' classes yielded similar numbers.

A subset of these students became members of focus groups. The strategy of using focus groups is advantageous to qualitative research because it allows for "getting reactions from a relatively wide range of participants in a relatively short time" (Morgan, 1996, p. 134). In order to minimize threats to validity, focus group participants were chosen carefully. I identified a total of 15 students using a stratified approach – five freshman students reading at an eighth to ninth grade level, five students reading at a seventh grade reading level, and five students reading at a sixth grade level. I chose students from different class periods in order to provide a more representative sample than could be obtained by studying an entire class period and analyzing its progress. Also, I focused on students whose reading abilities did not fall far below grade level in the hopes of avoiding the regression threat since "there would be a tendency for their posttest scores to be closer to the mean and higher than their pretest scores" (Smith & Glass, 1987, p. 131). I chose an additional fifteen students from other innovation participants' freshman English classes to broaden my grasp of students' perceptions and

compare their responses with my students. I used the same criteria when selecting these additional students.

After obtaining permission from both the students and their parents, I selected a total of five students to interview at the conclusion of this study in order to better understand their perceptions of reading instruction and the struggles they faced as readers. I chose two of my own students for these interviews and selected one student from each of the three other innovation participants' classes. These selections were based upon my own observations and the recommendations of the other teachers who believed this set of students would be the most forthright when answering the interview questions and typical of the larger group of students.

The researcher. Throughout this study, I played the role of both researcher and teacher participant. This dual role allowed me to implement reading comprehension strategy instruction in my own classroom, while simultaneously observing the effects of this instruction on my own students and those of my colleagues. In addition, I was able to provide ongoing training and leadership to support my innovation participants and promote the success of this innovation, while having first-hand knowledge and experience of the effectiveness of the reading comprehension strategy instruction occurring in freshman English language arts classrooms. I scheduled and arranged times for my teacher participants and I to meet to collaborate and brainstorm, and I observed strategy instruction in my innovation participants' classrooms throughout the study for the purpose of understanding their use of comprehension strategies and their students' responses to them. Finally, I also collected quantitative data garnered from the reading

diagnostic assessment used with the student participants and the TSLI administered at the beginning of the study.

Action Plan

This fourteen-week action research study involved 30 freshman English language arts students, fifteen additional English language arts teachers, three of whom taught freshman English language arts at Encanto High School and who formed the innovation participant subgroup, and me. This initiative integrated explicit instruction of reading comprehension strategies in our freshman classes, working in tandem with the district's freshman English language arts curriculum. It consisted of three areas of instruction: pre-reading strategies, during-reading strategies, and post-reading strategies. As evidenced from my literature review, these areas of instruction hold a potential to increase students' reading comprehension abilities.

One of the cornerstones of this innovation was to make learning meaningful for both students and teachers by using an inquiry method of instruction. Inquiry instruction, a form of active learning, involves questioning, data analysis, and critical thinking. It also helps learners progress through a series of steps in order to construct knowledge by activating prior knowledge and providing background information, setting goals and defining outcomes for which students will be held accountable, modeling these outcomes, and providing students with a focus for the inquiry (Bell, Smetana, & Binns, 2005). Applying inquiry method to this investigation, I guided teachers and students through various practices. Both groups called upon their prior knowledge and experiences to construct their original frames of thought regarding reading comprehension instruction (Benevino, et al., 1999). The learners, both teachers and students, were placed at the

center of this study, and were allowed to create their own paradigms of reading comprehension. Each reading comprehension strategy outlined below was presented and practiced with both groups of participants. The ultimate goal of this innovation was to empower students to construct meaning from texts by allowing them to develop their means of reading comprehension practice.

Pre-reading strategies. Instruction and class activities centered on the study of literature began during the first week of September, 2012. During the course of this initiative, the student participants studied both fiction and non-fiction pieces comprised of short stories and personal narrative/autobiographical writing. The innovation participants and I provided schema based pre-reading instruction before each reading assignment in order to motivate our students to read the required texts as well to prepare them to read them (Alyousef, 2005). Though pre-reading strategy instruction is sometimes overlooked because of time constraints, we committed to include it as part of our teaching. Pre-reading strategies are considered useful to facilitate reading comprehension because “readers can comprehend the text only if they reconstruct its content by relating their own schemata to the new information in the text” (Mihara, 2011, p. 52).

Students’ schema was activated through review and discussion prior to reading a text. Rather than pre-teaching a set of vocabulary words that have no context, we would select a key word or phrase from or related to the selection we were about to read. We would then engage students in a brief discussion of the chosen word or phrase, and we would work as a class to define its meaning. We made sure to steer the discussion toward concepts and themes that would be presented in the text. This process allowed students

the opportunity to become aware of the associations they made and also allowed for the building of prior knowledge where gaps existed.

For some lessons, we employed the use of graphic organizers or semantic mapping in order to provide a more detailed overview of the material students studied. Semantic maps require minimal preparation on the part of the teacher and provide for whole class interaction while affording students with an opportunity to share their own prior knowledge about the topic (Ajideh, 2003). Semantic mapping allows students to join together related pieces of information and form associations, which lead to the conceptualization of ideas. This follows the same pattern of human memory and allows learners to retain these concepts in their long-term memory (Barclay, 1990). The concept maps were designed to connect vocabulary with concepts and ideas that would they would encounter in the text. Through the use of semantic mapping, the class used its collective prior knowledge to build meaningful word clusters related to the upcoming reading. This was especially useful for students who lacked the sufficient background knowledge of the topic to be presented. Semantic mapping aims to link what readers will encounter in a text to what they already know, and it allows teachers to guide students “in a discussion of their own knowledge or experiences that are related in some way to the passage to be read” (Alyousef, 2005, p. 148).

During-reading strategies. Self-questioning was a during-reading strategy that was used throughout this study since it has been found to be effective based upon students’ observed comprehension gains (Mostwo & Chen, 2009). In order to teach students how to begin the process of self-questioning, the innovation participants and I instructed students to jot down two questions about the text while we read as a class. We

modeled this technique several times at the beginning of the study, and explained to students they could write down questions related to character motivation or plot; we also taught them to make predictions about a text as they read.

Proficient readers are active readers who are aware of why they are reading a text and how ideas encountered in the text might be used in the future. (Grisham, 2000). Predicting is an active strategy that requires readers to form inferences by asking themselves questions and recalling facts about the text. Predicting engages readers and connects them to the text by activating their prior knowledge and helps them connect new information to what they already know (*Teacher Vision*, 2004). During pauses in reading, we would call upon students to read a question or prediction they had formulated, and then we would work as a class to discuss possible answers and outcomes related to the question or prediction. We expected students to formulate questions and predictions for many of the texts read during this study, and we sometimes provided them a notecard prior to the reading on which to write their questions and predictions. These notecards became their exit tickets at the end of the period.

Graphic organizers were also used throughout the study as a during-reading strategy. The graphic organizers varied in design, but were often created to visually show students expository structures, such as cause and effect or chronological order. Graphic organizers help students to determine what information they should be looking for while they read, as well as providing them a better of understanding of what might come next (Iwai, 2011). This proved to be a useful during-reading strategy that was easy to integrate into daily instruction. Teachers created some of the graphic organizers used

during the study, and others were obtained from the ancillary materials published with our textbooks as well as teaching sites found on the Internet.

Assigned readings were completed in class throughout this study. During the first two weeks of this study, three fictional short story texts were assigned, and students listened to the audio recordings of each text provided by the textbook publisher. In order to model the various during-reading strategies, we sometimes periodically paused during the reading to ask questions of students and allow them the opportunity to ask clarifying questions. Once students were familiar with the various during reading techniques (e.g. self-questioning, predicting, completing graphic organizers), we provided time for the silent reading of subsequent texts. Students read each text independently and completed one or more during-reading strategy while they read. Students were required to turn in the work they completed for each independent reading assignment, which allowed the innovation participants to verify that students had completed the required during-reading strategies. The teachers were available during this time to field individual questions students had. During many lessons, students completed graphic organizers while they read the text.

Post-reading strategies. The first post-reading strategy we taught to our students was paraphrasing. We modeled the activity several times at the beginning of this study using the RAP model (**R**ead a paragraph; **A**sk myself, “What was the main idea and two details?” and **P**ut it into my own words) which guides students to identify the main idea and two details from a reading passage and then asks them to put those ideas and details into their own words. The RAP model is based on the theory that paraphrasing helps students retain the main ideas and details in a text (Hagaman & Reid, 2008). We began

the school year reading short texts, after which we directed students to come up with the main idea of the passage and two details from the reading. The class completed this activity at the beginning, and teachers wrote down student responses on the white board. We instructed our students to copy these responses on to the graphic organizer or semantic map they had completed during the reading. We used the paraphrasing strategy throughout the study, at least in some form, after completing each text. As the study progressed and students were reading independently and had become more familiar with the RAP model, we called upon them to complete this activity independently before sharing their paraphrasing with their shoulder partner, small group, or the class. Recalling main ideas and facts from a text is often a skill required of secondary students, and paraphrasing is an effective means of teaching students to be able to complete this task while also checking their own skills and comprehension of a text (Dieker & Little, 2005)

Writing a response of some kind allows students to make further connections with a text and further process and improve their understanding of the material read (Stevens, 2003). We required students to complete a writing extension activity after all texts read throughout the study. The responses varied based upon the material, but included personal responses, summaries, or answers to specific questions that teachers generated about the text. Teachers modeled the different types of responses prior to asking students to complete the activity the first time. We wrote our own responses to the text, either on the white board or in a computer document being projected on the classroom screen, in order to provide an example students could follow. Written responses not only help students make sense of a text, but they also allow them to practice their use of letters and phonemes, as well as syntax (Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000). Writing extensions were

used during this study because they provide students an opportunity to better understand the texts they read through the use of analysis, interpretation, or personalization (Graham & Hebert, 2010).

Teacher collaboration. The innovation participants were versed in the various reading comprehension strategies and their integration into daily lesson plans. Prior to the beginning of the study, the innovation participants met for two hours on two separate occasions to review the pre-, during-, and post- reading strategies we would employ during this study. I gave a broad overview of the various reading strategies I felt would be most effective based upon my research by presenting a summary of each and then exploring each of them in greater detail. We discussed possible texts we could teach during the study and the best strategies to select for the texts we would choose. To ensure the innovation participants had an understanding of each of the proposed reading strategies, we collaborated to produce sample lessons and activities that employed each method. We made the commitment to teach and employ the use of at least one pre-, during-, and post-reading strategy for each lesson we taught that involved reading a text, from the three texts we read as a class, through the remaining texts students read independently.

The innovation participants and I continued to meet every two weeks throughout the semester for one hour at a time in one of our classrooms to discuss the various reading strategies we were teaching our students and to brainstorm new ways to integrate them into our lesson plans. We would focus on a few particular strategies during each meeting, and I often served as the expert who would provide information, usually in the form of handouts and group discussions, to my colleagues about the strategies on which

they had chosen to focus. We would also take time to discuss how we felt our strategy instruction was progressing, and would discuss the various ways in which we could improve it. Since this study was conceived around a constructivist framework, I did not attempt to dictate that teachers follow a prescribed method of instruction, nor did I demand we all teach the same texts. Instead, I encouraged them to discover for themselves the strategies that worked best for them and their style of teaching, as well as the strategies that seemed to have the greatest effects on their students' achievement in reading.

The group of innovation participants and I met formally six times in our bi-weekly meetings during the course of this study. During the first four meetings, I presented two each of the pre, during, and post-reading strategies I wanted my innovation participants to introduce and teach to their students during the next two weeks (see Appendix A for suggested reading strategies). After the fourth meeting, I no longer introduced any new strategies, and we focused instead on refining our practice and discussing which strategies were working well for our students and for us. We also brainstormed and developed tools and materials to use for our strategy instruction. Many more informal meetings occurred throughout the semester where we would trade information and teaching materials. We communicated often through the use of our school email and supported each other in this way, as well.

This study's innovation involved a great deal of interaction between both teacher and student participants. In addition to the formal and scheduled meetings, the teachers and I agreed to meet as needed prior to and during this study to discuss reading comprehension strategy instruction and to brainstorm its integration into our daily

teaching. I led most of these meetings and provided teachers with materials outlining the various reading comprehension strategies. We worked together to find ways to infuse pre-reading, during-reading, and post-reading strategies into our instruction for each text we planned to assign. Each teacher participant and I monitored our students' response to strategy instruction, and we shared our observations during our subsequent meetings and worked together to refine our teaching in order to maximize students' progress. The teacher participants and I strove to hold our students accountable for utilizing the reading comprehension strategies we taught them, and we also held each other accountable for ensuring these strategies continued to be taught and required throughout the study.

Data Sources

As is inherent in a mixed-methods study, I utilized qualitative and quantitative data. Data were collected on an ongoing basis from September through December 2012. The confidentiality of the data collected was assured throughout the process. The schedule for collecting this data is located in Appendix B and an overview of the data sources is presented in Appendix C.

The mixed-methods approach to data collection followed the model discussed by Greene (2007) in order to achieve triangulation. As Greene states, mixed methods "refers to the intentional use of multiple methods, with offsetting or counteracting biases" in order to "strengthen the validity of inquiry results" (p. 42). Since all models of investigation have their inherent limitations and biases, utilizing two or more methods of data collection enhances the validity and credibility of the inquiry (Greene, 2007).

Triangulation for this action research study was achieved through multiple participants, a

teacher survey, group and individual interviews, field notes, and student reading assessments.

The following section describes the instruments and methodologies used to gather data for this action research. I generated data from five main sources: (a) Teacher Survey of Literacy Instruction, (b) group interviews, (c), individual interviews, (d) the 7 Minute Reading Test, and (e) field notes.

Teacher Survey of Literacy Instruction. In order to understand secondary English teachers' stance on literacy instruction, I created the Teacher Survey of Literacy Instruction (TSLI), which I based on the AIM for Literacy Survey developed by the West Virginia Department of Education (2008) (Appendix D). This created an instrument appropriate for my action research study and helped provide information about the selection and infusion of strategy instruction. The TSLI generated quantifiable data and was divided into five sections. Four constructs were measured using this survey. Respondents used a Likert scale of 1 to 4 for all items. The first section focused on collecting demographic data through a series of short response questions.

Collaborative Leadership and School Capacity was the first measurable construct of the TSLI. Teachers answered questions regarding their perceived level of support from school leadership as well as financial support available to address the literacy needs of students at Encanto High School and other schools in the district. The instrument's second construct, entitled *Content Literacy*, asked teachers to rate the frequency of literacy instruction at their school site and the degree to which it is integrated into daily lesson planning, as well as their own comfort level surrounding the teaching of reading comprehension strategies. *Professional Development to Support Literacy* was the third

construct measured by the TSLI. This section surveyed teachers on the degree of professional development and support they received for literacy instruction. The final construct of the TSLI, *Teacher Self-efficacy*, asked teachers to rate their level of preparedness regarding literacy instruction, as well as the professional expectations they held surrounding literacy instruction across content areas.

The TSLI was created in Microsoft Word and delivered to teachers via email, who in turn typed in their responses and sent the completed instrument back to me. I piloted the survey instrument in the spring of 2012 and revised it to improve its effectiveness before being I gave it to teachers in September of the same year. Data from the survey were entered into SPSS and analyzed by generating descriptive statistics. As previously stated, a total of 15 English language arts teachers participated in the survey: twelve from Encanto High School three from other schools in the district.

Focus group interviews: Teachers. Focus group interviews with teachers were completed to examine ideas and issues generated from the TSLI (Stringer, 2007). Focus group interviews were chosen as a data source since they allow for a forum in which the diverse perspectives and opinions of individuals are desired. Focus group interviews have the potential to yield more accurate information about what the individual participants actually think, since their thoughts and opinions are critical for understanding the topic (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). Three focus group interviews were conducted in September of 2012. Each group consisted of three or four teachers. Each focus group of teachers participated in a semi-structured interview, and each teacher present was given the opportunity to express his or her opinions and perspectives regarding teaching reading comprehension strategies in high school English classes. The

focus group interview questions (Appendix E) consisted of open ended, probing questions designed to facilitate discussion surrounding teachers' own perceptions of their abilities and preparedness to teach students strategies to build reading comprehension.

I designed the focus group interviews to inform my understanding of how and why secondary English language arts teachers choose and infuse reading comprehension strategies in their classrooms and to understand how both teachers and students respond to the use of these strategies. I chose focus group interviews as a forum for teachers to speak freely about what they do in their classrooms and to explain why (or why not) they teach reading comprehension strategies. My role as the researcher and moderator of the focus group interviews was to initiate the topics for discussion but not to offer any viewpoints during the session. Instead, I encouraged the participants of the focus group to talk to each other and to share anecdotes and ask questions and comment about their peers' experiences and points-of-view (Ho, 2006). I used the TSLI survey data to inform the discussion topics, and data from the focus group interviews were triangulated with the TSLI and individual teacher interviews.

I took notes during the focus group interviews while teachers talked, and I also recorded these interviews using a digital audio recorder. After each focus group interview, I summarized the discussions for the purpose of data analysis. Summary transcription was chosen because it immediately allowed me to begin to saturate the data. Rather than complete word-for-word transcriptions of the interviews, summary transcription afforded me the opportunity to immerse myself in the language of my participants and begin to draw out relevant data from that language.

Individual interviews: Teachers. At the conclusion of this study, I completed semi-structured interviews with the three innovation participants who had infused strategy instruction into their teaching as I had. Interview questions were generated in the hopes that teachers would express and discuss their concerns surrounding literacy instruction in their own classrooms, as well as their perceptions of the innovation's effectiveness. Questions for the individual interviews came as a result of the responses and discussions that arose from the focus group interviews and the discussion and feedback discussed during our meetings and collaborations throughout the study (see Appendix F for teacher interview questions). After each individual teacher interview, I transcribed the interview for the purpose of data analysis.

Individual interviews: Students. As previously explained, I interviewed a subset of students at the conclusion of this study in order to learn their perspectives and perceived effectiveness of the reading comprehension strategies they had been taught. Students were chosen from each of the teacher participants' classes, including my own. Students were encouraged to share how they used the various reading comprehension strategies they had been taught and to report on which ones they used most often as well as their effectiveness in constructing meaning from a text (see Appendix G for student interview questions).

Overall, I chose individual interviews as a data collection method because of the level of detail they provide. During an individual interview, I could effectively probe and ask follow up questions and typically increase teachers' and students' willingness to share their concerns with no one else present. Individual interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder and were transcribed directly, using word-for-word transcription.

The 7 Minute Reading Test. The 7 Minute Reading Test (Appendix H) is an assessment tool that has been used on an informal basis across the district for a number of years. The test, which indeed is timed to take only seven minutes, is a 30-question, multiple-choice reading comprehension assessment designed to determine students' reading levels. The 7 Minute Reading Test begins with short, easy questions and progresses to longer and more challenging questions. When the test is completed and scored, it provides a quick snapshot of students' reading comprehension abilities. The innovation participants and I administered the 7 Minute Reading Test three times in order to track student progress during this action research study – once at the study's beginning, once at the halfway point, and again at its conclusion.

The 7 Minute Reading Test was originally developed by the Utah State Office of Education to quickly determine the grade level at which secondary students read. Once its use became prevalent in the district, the district's English language arts content specialist validated its accuracy by comparing students' reading levels determined by the 7 Minute Reading Test with the same students' Lexile levels generated from the READ 180 SRI. Administration of the 7 Minute Reading Test is not mandated, but many teachers and departments choose to use it several times throughout the school year to determine their students' reading levels and to monitor their progress. The scores, which are numeric values corresponding directly to a student's grade-level reading ability, were entered into an online database. A sampling of these scores from various school sites were compared with reading levels determined by the SRI in order to support the validity of this assessment. It was established that the reading levels determined by each

instrument varied only slightly, and the district now considers the 7 Minute Reading Test a valid measure of student reading level.

Field notes. I employed field notes as part of my data collection in order to corroborate data collected from the focus group and individual interviews and the 7 Minute Reading Test. I observed the innovation participants who agreed to teach similar reading comprehension strategies in their freshman English language arts classes. I observed each of the participants on two occasions, once during the first three weeks of the study and a second time during the final three weeks of the study. These observations lasted the entire length of one 50-minute class period. During these observations I took descriptive notes regarding the strategies they were teaching, the delivery of this instruction, and the responses of the students. Following the observations, I added reflective notes regarding my impressions of the teachers' delivery of the instruction and its perceived effectiveness. I took the descriptive notes I collected from my observations of other teachers in real time using a laptop computer.

During observations of the teacher participants, I also observed students and noted their actions during their studies of an assigned text. I looked specifically at student behaviors and if students were using the reading comprehension strategies they had been taught, both individually and during small group instruction. I paid close attention to any questions that students asked during this time, as well as anything else I noticed directly or indirectly. I completed the reflective notes regarding student behavior during and immediately following my observations.

To collect data from my own instruction, I recorded myself teaching twice during the study using a digital video recorder. I reviewed the video recordings using the same

observation guidelines I had used for observing other teachers and took descriptive notes regarding the strategies I was teaching and reflective notes regarding their delivery. I also observed and recorded the behavior of my students and their use of reading comprehension strategies. These notes were taken the same day as each video recording was made and followed the same template I used when observing the innovation participants (see Appendix I for observation template).

Data Analysis

Teacher Survey of Literacy Instruction. Quantitative data from the TLSI survey instrument were entered into SPSS, and descriptive statistics were gathered and computed to determine means, mean differences, and effect sizes. The four constructs of the TLSI were compared against each other as well as the demographic data to determine correlations between teacher efficacy regarding literacy instruction and its relationship to administrative support, professional development opportunities, teacher preparation programs, and years of teaching experience.

Interviews. Data from the focus group interviews, teacher interviews, and student interviews were organized and prepared prior to analysis. This preparation involved reviewing and revising the notes I took during the interviews, including reviewing the audio recordings taken during the interviews to fill in any missing gaps of information. I read through all of the data to obtain a general sense of the information collected and then reflected on its overall meaning (Creswell, 2009). I made notes in the margins regarding the tone of the interviews and wrote down any additional information pertinent to the overall meaning.

The materials from the interviews were assembled and sorted to begin the analysis with a coding process. Before bringing meaning to the information, coding is necessary to chunk and segment the text data into categories and label those categories with a term based upon the language of the participants (Creswell, 2009). Rather than using predetermined codes, the codes for this study emerged during the data analysis. The codes that emerged were recorded in a two-column table created in Microsoft Word. The names of the codes were recorded in the first column and the definition of each code was recorded in the second column. The qualitative computer software program, Dedoose, was used to assist with the aggregation of this large amount of data. The coding process was used to generate the categories and themes for analysis.

The 7 Minute Reading Test. Scores for the seven reading minute test were in the form of a numerical value which corresponded directly to the students' reading levels. The teacher participants and I gave the test three times throughout the course of this study: at the beginning, at the midpoint, six weeks in, and at its conclusion. The scores of the student participants were recorded in a spreadsheet in SPSS and this data were compared to determine if there were any trends seen in reading levels.

Field notes. For the data analysis of the field notes, I combined predetermined and emerging codes. The predetermined codes built upon those generated during the interview data analyses. I added others as necessary to capture the observational data. The codes were once again recorded in a two-column table in Microsoft Word and the same qualitative computer software program was used to assist in the analysis of the coded data from the field notes and to further generate categories and themes for analysis.

Chapter 4

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

While the previous chapter explained the methodologies involved in this study's data collection, this chapter organizes the analysis into two main sections. First, an inventory of the data sources described in the previous chapter is provided to more precisely explain how the data were collected, the statistical analysis of the quantitative data, and the steps taken to code and analyze the qualitative data. Second, the results of the analyses are explained for each of the various sources as they pertain to the research questions under consideration.

Data Inventory

This study followed a mixed-methods design, as previously explained, in order to gain a better understanding of the research questions. The concurrent design of the study used quantitative and qualitative data collected at the same time, and it employed the use of concurrent triangulation to analyze both data types contemporaneously (Greene, 2007).

Quantitative Analysis

Two types of quantitative data were used during this study: The Teacher Survey of Literacy Instruction and the 7 Minute Reading Test. Quantitative data were collected using non-experimental designs in order to provide a “numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions” of the population of teachers and students participating in this study (Creswell, 2009, p. 12). The hope was to capture teachers' perceptions regarding the literacy focus at their school site and within the district, as well as their own self-efficacies as literacy teachers. Quantitative data were also analyzed to explore whether infusing explicit reading comprehension instruction into freshman English classes

contributed to student reading growth and progress. An inventory of quantitative data collected and analyzed in this study is displayed in Table 1.

Descriptive statistics for the quantitative data collected during this study, which included the Teacher Survey of Literacy Instruction and the 7 Minute Reading Test, were computed using IBM's SPSS Statistics, v. 20 in order to calculate frequencies, means, mean differences, and effect sizes. This was done to determine teachers' perceptions of literacy instruction in their own classrooms and in their schools and school district, and to measure any growth that occurred in student reading scores during the study. Descriptive statistics are "mathematical techniques for organizing and summarizing a set of numerical data" and are used to provide simple summaries about the sample and how the observations were made (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003, p. 131). Effect sizes measured the impact of the innovation and were calculated using Cohen's *d* to indicate the difference between two means. Data from the 7 Minute Reading Test were analyzed by comparing the reading scores from the student focus group participants who totaled 30. For statistical interpretation related to the progress students made in their reading abilities, I applied Cohen's benchmarks of $d = .20$ as small, $.50$ as moderate, and $.80$ as large (Cohen, 1988).

Qualitative Analysis

Four types of qualitative data sources were used for this study: teacher focus group interviews, field notes, individual teacher interviews, and individual student interviews. These data were collected and analyzed using constant comparison, which refers to the "continual process of comparing segments within and across categories" (Gall et al., 2003, p. 456). The materials were assembled and sorted and then compared

in various ways in order to note similarities and differences within the pieces of qualitative data. Constant comparisons are necessary to data analysis because they “allow the researcher to differentiate one category/theme from another and identify properties and dimensions specific to that category/theme” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 73). Table 2 displays an inventory of the qualitative data collected and analyzed for the study.

I began the analysis of these data sources with *open coding* by reading and re-reading the transcriptions of the individual and focus group interviews, as well as my field notes, multiple times. The process of open coding involves “breaking apart the data and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data,” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 195). After reading the focus group interviews, I noted words and phrases that were directly related to the research questions driving this study. I employed the same technique when analyzing both the teacher and student individual interviews. While reading through my field notes of teacher observations, I noted the teachers’ selections of reading comprehension strategies, as well as the materials they used and the students’ responses to the assigned tasks. I read through the data several more times, employing the technique of *axial coding* in order to analyze the data by “crosscutting or relating concepts to each other” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 195). The codes which emerged consisted of key terms and phrases related to the notion of reading comprehension strategy instruction, as well as the challenges associated with reading comprehension, and the various approaches and methodologies teachers employ when selecting reading comprehension strategies to infuse into their daily instruction.

After several passes through the data, the following six codes were inductively constructed with regard to how secondary language arts teachers select and infuse reading comprehension strategies into their instruction. The six codes were: (a) purpose, (b) connection, (c) building background, (d) vocabulary instruction, (e) comprehension tools, and (f) depth and breadth. For example, observations of teachers working with students to determine an author's reason for writing a piece of literature were coded as *purpose*, and activities to connect the ideas and themes of a text to students' lives or experiences were coded as *connection*. Teachers wanting to activate students' prior knowledge and relate that knowledge to the themes and ideas associated with a particular reading selection were coded as *building background*, and the code *vocabulary instruction* was used when teaching students vocabulary words critical to their understanding a text. Mentions of graphic organizers, semantic maps, and concept maps were coded as *comprehension tools*, and teachers' decisions to explore a text deeply and at length were coded as *depth and breadth*.

When reading through the qualitative data again, I noted when teacher participants mentioned challenges they faced regarding literacy instruction. This resulted in the following list of five codes: (a) varied levels, (b) student apathy, (c) lack of knowledge, (d) lack of support, and (e) lack of vision. When a teacher participant mentioned the varied reading levels of his or her students, for example, I coded this as *varied levels*; mention of students' lack of motivation was coded as *student apathy*. When teacher participants spoke about not being prepared or trained to teach reading to their students, these utterances were coded as *lack of knowledge*. Indications of perceived leadership failures to provide adequate resources for literacy instruction in

content area classes were coded as *lack of support*, and the code *lack of vision* was used when teachers expressed the absence of a clear plan for building literacy at their school sites.

During the final pass through the data, I noted mentions from teachers and students regarding the successes they had experienced with regard to reading comprehension strategy instruction. Seven codes emerged from this effort, which were (a) understanding of strategy instruction, (b) increased vocabulary, (c) teachers' confidence, (d) students' confidence, (e) preparedness, (f) student engagement, and (g) multiple strategies. Utterances from innovation participants that illustrated their grasp of reading instruction were coded as *understanding of strategy instruction*, and when they spoke of their new-found abilities to teach reading comprehension strategies, these statements were coded as *teachers' confidence*. Similarly, the code *student confidence* was used when student participants talked of their abilities to read and comprehend a text. *Preparedness* was used to describe the array of strategy instructions innovation participants have at their disposal, which can easily integrate into their daily lesson planning. Use of the *student engagement* code occurred while reviewing field notes of classroom observations. I applied this code when I noted students were actively participating in the reading comprehension activities their teachers had presented. Teachers' uses of different strategies within a lesson and from one observation to the next were coded as *multiple strategies*.

Once the coding was complete for all of the interviews and the observations, I reviewed and collapsed the codes into the themes that had emerged during the coding process and grouped these themes into three categories associated with my research

questions. The collapsed codes resulted in the following three themes that form the basis of the data analysis: (1) barriers to teaching reading, (2) gateways to literacy instruction, and (3) student growth and progress.

Examinations and Outcomes of the Data

Data collected from the various sources indicate that secondary language arts teachers struggle with literacy instruction for a number of reasons, ranging from student apathy to a dearth of professional development opportunities available to learn strategic reading instruction practices. Notwithstanding, the innovation participants who committed to infusing reading comprehension strategy instruction as part of their regular instructional practice reported gains in their own efficacy as literacy teachers, as well as improvements in their students' reading comprehension skills. Said one of the innovation participants of her students' reading abilities, "We've done a better job showing them how they can relate to pieces of the story, even if it is not something they have experienced themselves." The same teacher noted that when she looked at her students' scores on the 7 Minute Reading Test, she noticed their scores had improved since the beginning of the study, and stated the increased focus on reading comprehension strategy instruction was beneficial to both her and the students. Another of the innovation participants reported similar results when he was interviewed at the conclusion of the study. Specifically, he felt having a variety of reading comprehension strategies at his disposal had increased his students' interest in literary analysis and helped them to become better readers. "Having multiple strategies to use and mix it up makes it that much more engaging to the students," he said, also adding that his students were more willing to discuss the text at a deeper level than they had been in previous years.

Student participants also recorded quantitative gains in their reading levels and increased their confidence as readers. Data from the 7 Minute Reading Test show positive gains in the majority of student participants, with some students raising their reading levels on this measure by more than a grade level during the study. Interviews with students regarding comprehension strategies also yielded results indicative their efficacies as readers. When asked if she felt as though she had become a better reader since the beginning of the school year, one student replied, “I feel like I’ve been able to use the skills I’ve been taught for reading, and those skills have helped me understand and go deeper into the meaning of the sentences.” In regard to how she had been able to use the reading comprehension strategies she had been taught, she said, “You’re able to fill in the empty spots, be able to read between the lines, make your own inferences and opinions.” From this brief synopsis of research findings, the following sections more fully explain these themes and statistical findings and their convergent contributions to the research questions.

Barriers to Teaching Reading

Analyses of both the quantitative and qualitative data were conducted to better understand the barriers English language arts teachers face when providing literacy instruction to their students. Data from the TSLI were reviewed to compare the constructs measured by the survey instrument and the demographic information collected from the survey participants. Frequency tables and descriptive tables were generated to analyze the data, which suggested that many teachers do not feel adequately prepared or supported to instruct students in literacy building concepts in secondary English language arts classrooms. Nearly half of the teachers surveyed (47%) agree that they do not routinely

use instructional reading strategies in their daily lesson plans, and 67% of surveyed teachers said they do not engage in reflective teaching and self-assessment of their instructional practices to provide direction for ongoing literacy instruction planning.

Using data collected from the TSLI, I calculated the frequencies of responses to the first construct of *Collaborative Leadership and School Capacity* in order to determine how teachers in the district, and specifically at Encanto High School, feel site leadership affects and influences their decisions to integrate reading comprehension strategy instruction into their lesson planning and daily teaching. The results of this calculation are seen in Table 3.

The construction of the frequency table for the first construct of the survey instrument provided data that supported the following conclusions regarding how teachers view the administration's actions surrounding the teaching of literacy. Sixty percent of teachers feel that school administrators do not play a noticeable role in improving literacy at each school, but 12 of 15 teachers feel their school's administration still supports the idea of integrating literacy instruction across content areas. The findings from this section of the TSLI suggest that teachers perceive that school leaders support reading instruction in content area classes such as English language arts, but the school's vision and plan to build literacy is not well organized or adequately resourced in order to produce perceptible results. This conforms to the existing scholarship on the topic of literacy instruction in secondary schools, which notes that few resources are being directed to literacy initiatives at the secondary level, including effective professional development for teachers (Vacca, 2002).

The surveyed teachers held differing viewpoints as to whether their school's staff, including its administration, placed reading and literacy instruction as part of their responsibility. As noted previously, many secondary teachers do not feel it is their responsibility to teach reading, holding the belief that students should come to high school prepared to master the texts that are required for their coursework, and that reading instruction should be left to reading teachers, if it is to be included in the secondary curriculum at all. Furthermore, slightly more than half of the teachers surveyed indicated that data do not drive the development of school improvement plans, which might suggest that data from reading diagnostics are not being adequately used to design interventions and instructional models that would best support students' literacy needs.

To analyze survey data in the area of content literacy, the TSLI's second construct, I created a table after using SPSS to calculate the mean and standard deviation of the responses to this portion of the survey (see Table 4). The purpose of this portion of the data analysis was to determine to what extent literacy instruction is provided to students in English language arts classes. The highest possible response to the survey questions was a 4.0, which indicated complete agreement with the statement.

The results from this portion of the survey do not indicate strong attention to the various areas of content literacy. The data indicate that teachers have at least some opportunity to attend professional development sessions to learn instructional strategies in reading, and they imply that some teachers might be using these strategies in their daily instruction. The data also show that while teachers might provide some appropriate literacy instruction to their students, it is not clear to what extent this happens in the

typical English language arts classroom at Encanto High School or at other schools in the district.

The data from this construct also show that, according to those who were surveyed, teachers do not provide frequent instruction to their students as to how to best use class textbooks or other outside sources of information to further students' skills and abilities for content literacy in English language arts. Research has shown this to be a trend in secondary schools, noting that "as the academic demands on our secondary students become more complicated, explicit reading instruction diminishes" (Ness, 2007, p. 229). The data collected for the second construct also show that clear evidence of reading as a school-wide goal is not strong; although, there is evidence to imply that school leadership across campuses highlights the importance of reading across content areas, even if it does not support these initiatives with utilizable resources. As explained by a teacher during a focus group interview, school and district leadership make their best efforts in regard to support literacy instruction, but their execution is unfruitful. She also said that the district offers in-services for teachers to learn to teach literacy, but with everything else that teachers are expected to do, literacy instruction often falls by the wayside.

The final construct of the TSLI was designed to measure teachers' self-efficacy regarding literacy instruction and to determine whether language arts teachers consider themselves qualified to teach literacy strategies to their students. This portion of the survey instrument also asked English language arts teachers to rate whether or not they believe reading strategy instruction is their responsibility and/or should be shared with

other teachers across content areas. I used SPSS to calculate the mean of each item in this section of the survey instrument. The results of this analysis can be seen in Table 5.

It terms of teacher self-efficacy regarding literacy instruction, the participant pool exhibited slight variations. Many do not feel as though their teacher training programs adequately prepared them to teach literacy strategies to secondary students, and many still do not feel qualified after several years of teaching. Across the board, however, the teachers surveyed feel as though literacy instruction is an issue that must reach beyond the English language arts classroom, and that all teachers, regardless of content area, should teach students literacy strategies to better comprehend the materials required for their courses.

Before concluding the analysis of the quantitative data collected from the TSLI, I once again used SPSS to determine trends and evaluate the consistency and intercorrelation of the survey instrument and to determine possible relationships between variables. The summary I created (see Table 6) indicates a trend between the number of years the participants had taught and the perceptions they had of their abilities to meet the reading needs of their students.

Questions on the TSLI asked the 15 English survey participants if they believed themselves to be qualified to address the reading challenges their students face. The responses varied from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The statistical evidence generated by these responses suggests that teachers with fifteen or fewer years of secondary classroom experience believe themselves to be better qualified to address their students' reading needs than their colleagues who had taught for sixteen years or more. According to Friedman (2004), "content in classrooms is not keeping pace with

increasing globalization and the demands for twenty-first-century employees with new literacy skills” (as cited in Lawrence, et al., 2009, p. 40). This may explain the disconnect more experienced teachers face regarding their ability to impart literacy skills to their students. If teachers who have spent many years in the classroom are out of touch with the needs of a new generation of students – whose literacy needs include problem solving, peer collaboration, and technology skills – it is possible that their younger colleagues may be more adept at reaching students and meeting their literacy needs, while selecting material about which students have more schema (Friedman, 2004).

An analysis of the qualitative data collected from the individual and focus group teacher interviews helped to triangulate the data collected by the TSLI and further illuminates the obstacles faced by English language arts teachers with regard to reading comprehension instruction. Teachers interviewed in focus groups expressed their lack of confidence in their abilities to teach reading comprehension skills to secondary students. Many of these teachers do not view themselves as reading teachers, despite the body of research that indicates reading comprehension strategy instruction to be effective at the secondary level (Lawrence, et al., 2009). According to one of the focus group participants, “Literacy instruction is the job of the reading teachers. It’s not so much what I do.” Also, the data suggest that teachers often base their pedagogical decisions on the curriculum requirements they must uphold, as well as the standardized tests their students are required to pass, which often leaves little to no time for literacy instruction. As another focus group participant explains, “High school students are not receiving this instruction in lower grade levels, and they are not receiving it from their English teachers in high school.” This teacher goes on to state that if students do not have the basic skills

of literacy and reading comprehension, it is difficult for them to progress as readers since literacy is seldom taught in high school English classrooms.

The concept of “outside detractors” also emerged as a significant barrier to literacy instruction. Data from teacher interviews suggest that issues such as student apathy and behavior, coupled with the feeling that school leadership is working against teachers and undermining their decisions, also contribute to the lack of reading instruction that occurs in secondary English language arts classes. Says one freshman English language arts teacher about his students, “I think they have this mindset that says, ‘I might not understand the words, but I won’t take the time to re-read and understand.’” He explains that students will read each word of an assigned text, but they do not care if they understand it, nor do they care to take the necessary steps to learn how to comprehend the material they read. Other teachers who participated in focus group interviews felt school and district leaders were not adequately addressing the students’ literacy needs and preferred quick, “Band-Aid” fixes to the problem of low literacy skills to practical solutions that teachers could implement in their classrooms. As one innovation participant states regarding the various literacy initiatives she has witnessed, “We keep changing how we do things, but there is no resolution, no support.”

The data from teacher interviews also indicate that they are daunted by the significant variation of student reading abilities within their classes, casting it as one of the predominate barriers interfering with literacy instruction and another explanation for its lack of infusion in their English classes. For teachers who already lack confidence in their abilities as reading teachers, the broad spectrum of students’ reading abilities, which sometimes vary from elementary levels to levels beyond high school in the same class,

further challenges them. As one teacher explains, “School leaders don’t have a background in teaching reading in their content areas, and they don’t understand the challenges of having kids reading at so many reading levels in one class.” She goes on to say that she believes students should be tracked by their reading abilities and placed in classes of similar learners. That way, she explains, the teacher could focus on the specific needs of their learners, rather than trying to address so many varied needs as is currently the case in English language arts classes.

Gateways to Literacy Instruction

While much of the data collected from all teacher participants during the study indicate the challenges secondary teachers face that prevent them from incorporating reading comprehension strategy instruction into their teaching, qualitative data collected from the innovation participants suggest that collaborative inquiry among English language arts teachers might contribute to successful implementation of literacy instruction that is beneficial to students’ growth and progress. Data from the individual interviews with the innovation participants, which has been triangulated against observational data from these teachers’ classroom, student interviews, and data from the 7 Minute Reading Test, suggest the innovation participants increased their self-efficacy regarding literacy instruction and were successful in infusing strategy instruction into their teaching practice. During classroom observations of innovation participants, students were observed completing graphic organizers during their reading and were often called upon to paraphrase sections of the text. When the teachers asked students specific comprehension questions about their reading, the students were typically able to answer these questions correctly, indicating they understood what they read. In addition,

innovation participants were also observed using the post-reading strategy of writing extensions in order to encourage their students to make personal or real-world connections to the text. These written responses further indicated a level of comprehension beyond a basic understanding of simple elements such as plot and setting.

Innovation participants noted that an increased focus on reading comprehension strategy instruction boosted confidence in their abilities to teach them to their students. According to one of these teachers, who teaches junior and senior advancement placement English in addition to freshman English, focusing on reading comprehension strategy instruction helps her better gauge the needs of her students. “We took it a little bit each day,” she said, and added, “I followed the pace of the students’ understanding rather than a set lesson plan.” This teacher also stated that her students enjoy working through different projects and activities that lead to a deeper understanding of the text, and that she plans to employ similar strategies with her advanced placement classes. The data show that these teachers are more likely to infuse specific reading comprehension strategy instruction into their teaching when they have a myriad of strategies at their disposal and they understand how and why those strategies will potentially improve their students’ ability to read and comprehend a text. The data also show that these teachers are regularly infusing pre-, during- and post-reading strategies into their practice and have reduced the number of texts they assign so that they can increase the depth at which their students analyze and understand the material. These teachers “chunk” literary selections into smaller pieces to allow students the opportunity to build schema and make meaningful associations and connections with the text, which may contribute to advancement in their students’ comprehension abilities. Observational data corroborate

the teacher interviews. During one classroom observation, the students and teacher worked together to create a plot diagram of the story they had read and then used the graphic to write summaries of the text. In another innovation participant's class, students began a K-W-L chart and then watched an informational video clip on Ancient Greece in order to build background knowledge before they studied *The Odyssey*. Following the video, the class engaged in a discussion that eventually led to a collaborative activity during which time students worked with one or two of their classmates to complete the final section of the chart.

Innovation participants noted during the individual interviews that having a multitude of reading comprehension strategies they could use led to an increase in student engagement during literature studies. The data from the individual interviews suggest that teachers, who are able to choose from a larger pool of reading comprehension strategies and activities, are more successful in reaching their students and holding their interest throughout the reading of a text. The data indicate that teachers who consistently provide reading comprehension strategy instruction find that their students increase their vocabulary and better understand how the words they read create meaning. Another of the innovation participants explained, "It's like giant light bulbs going off in my class. Before the kids didn't want to read because they didn't understand the texts, now they're asking to read because they know there is no judgment. It is awesome."

During the study, the innovation participants ensured they had time to complete pre-reading activities before each piece of literature they assigned to their students, which afforded the opportunity for a greater depth of analysis and more chances for helping students build and activate schema. Data collected during classroom observations of the

innovation participants illustrates the use of many pre-reading activities designed to build background and help students activate schema before reading a text. This was evidenced in one of the recorded observations of my own classes when I devoted nearly an entire class period to pre-reading activities for Guy de Maupassant's short story, "The Necklace." Students viewed images of Paris, France and discussed what they knew about social hierarchies, as well as relating their own desires to "fit in" among their peers. When they began reading the short story the following day, my students drew parallels between the main character's need to garner praise and attention with their own experiences in peer groups. When they were asked questions directly related to their understanding of the story, nearly all of them answered correctly.

Student Growth and Progress

The 7 Minute Reading Test was used for the study to determine student participants' grade level reading abilities and to track those reading levels throughout the study. Means were calculated in SPSS to perform an analysis of the data, which indicate 67% of student participants increased their reading abilities during the study. Using data collected from the 7 Minute Reading Test, I calculated the mean reading levels of student participants at each of the three points during the study the assessment was administered, which can be seen in Table 7.

The analysis of this data shows student participants increased their overall reading abilities by nearly an entire grade level during the 14 weeks of the study. While data from this investigation does not allow for a direct causal chain, these data suggest that the intervention, comprised of explicit reading comprehension strategy instruction, contributed to assisting students to perform better on this school-based assessment. In

order to gain a better understanding of the data collected by the 7 Minute Reading Test, I also calculated the average growth of student participants in each of the three tiers of initial reading scores (see Table 8) to determine which group saw the greatest gains in their progress as readers.

Students in each of the three tiers made progress in their reading abilities during the study, with the students whose initial reading scores indicated a sixth grade reading level making the largest gains. Students who began the study reading at a sixth grade level showed an average growth of a more than a grade. Students who began the study reading at a higher level saw more moderate gains in their reading levels, as defined by Cohen's *d*, gaining 0.65-0.81 reading levels.

Finally, I sought to determine if the overall progress students made in their reading scores occurred at greater intervals among the innovation participants. As shown in Table 9, I calculated the average level of student growth in my classes and the other teachers' classes.

Each teacher whose students participated in the study saw noticeable gains in their students' reading abilities by the time the study concluded; however, the greatest average gains were seen in my own classes. The student participants I instructed averaged a level of growth nearly double that of the students in the other teachers' classes, which may suggest the other innovation participants did not spend as much instructional time teaching reading comprehension strategies to their students as I did, or they did not possess as much self-efficacy and knowledge of reading comprehension strategy instruction. Ness (2007) suggests that "teacher training and professional development opportunities are not effectively conveying the range of pedagogical possibilities for

supporting students' reading comprehension" (p. 230), and while the innovation participants reported during their individual interviews that they found our collaborative approach to professional development to be useful, the professional development they received was limited by the short duration of the study.

Data collected from the student interviews further uphold the potential benefits of direct and explicit reading comprehension strategy instruction in freshman English classes. Analysis of student interview transcripts suggests that students gain better understanding of assigned texts when teachers break down the material into smaller pieces and provide graphic organizers and semantic maps to help guide students through the reading. "When I don't understand something we read, I do diagraming to figure the story out," says one student who also states he has become a better reader since the beginning of the school year and that contextualizing stories with background information on the topic helps him to comprehend what he is reading. The words of another student participant echo a similar sentiment. "The graphic organizers can help because writing things out in your own way helps you understand and know more about what you've just read," he said when describing what reading strategies he had learned that were most useful to him. These data also indicate that students increase their comprehension of texts through paraphrasing and writing extensions designed to help them make inferences and personal and/or real-world connections. A student from one of my classes says that she employs several different reading comprehension strategies, but likes writing extensions the best. "Writing about a text helps me understand it," she says. "I look for the main details and go back and read more closely."

Finally, student interview data show that students report an increase in their vocabulary during the course of the study and their use of their understanding of words to help them better extract meaning from a text. “My vocabulary is going up, and I’m using bigger words,” says a student from another innovation participant’s class. “It’s good to do the vocabulary assignments because the words click with me, and I learn them fast. When we look at them in context, I remember them.” Data from student interviews aligns with the research regarding reading comprehension strategy instruction, which indicates that instructional approaches such as those outlined previously have proven to address the needs of struggling adolescent readers (Biancarosa & Snow, 2003).

Summation of Data Analysis

Keeping with the essence of mixed methods design, multiple quantitative and qualitative data sources were incorporated into this action research study in order to maintain credibility (Greene, 2007). I sought to achieve triangulation to ensure that my findings could be substantiated by different data sources because, “the inclusion of perspectives from diverse sources enables the inquirer to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the phenomena are being perceived” (as cited in Stringer, 2007, p. 58). This process led to key findings linked to my research questions.

First, and of most importance, I asked what impact strategy instruction has on freshman English students’ performance on reading diagnostic tests and reading achievement measures. The innovation accomplished the goal of infusing comprehension strategies into the innovation participants’ classroom practices for the benefit of their students, and the data show that ongoing and consistent reading instruction may contribute to students improving their reading comprehension abilities.

Second, I asked how secondary English language arts teachers select and infuse strategy instruction into their ongoing practice. The data suggest instructional decisions for reading are often based upon teachers' own feelings of efficacy as literacy instructors. If teachers feel confident in their understanding of reading strategies and how those tactics will influence their students' reading abilities, they are more likely to integrate pre-, during-, and post-reading activities into their lessons on a continuing basis.

These findings lead to the third research question in which I asked how students and teachers respond to the use of strategy instruction in their freshman English classes. The responses from the innovation and student participants were overwhelmingly positive. Both groups reported noticeable gains in their efficacies, with students noting they were able to use the strategies as tools for understanding difficult texts. Similarly, teachers reported noticing their students' reading comprehension skills improve quickly, which motivated them to continue their literacy instruction.

Finally, I asked what role does regular collaboration among freshman English teachers serve when they attempt to infuse literacy strategies into their classroom practices. The data show that collaboration was a meaningful approach to professional development for the innovation participants, since the teachers were given the opportunity to work together to determine how to best meet the needs of their students. Innovation participants describe our collaborative efforts as effective, since they were tailored directly to their needs as teachers and their students' needs as readers.

The next chapter will explore two areas. First, I will offer interpretations that the data from my action research project suggest. Then, I will further consider their links to existing scholarship.

Chapter 5

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Two purposes guided this study. The first purpose was to better understand the limitations and challenges secondary English language arts teachers encounter when teaching reading comprehension strategies to their students. Two, it attempted to determine if a collaborative approach to professional development, grounded in a constructivist framework, benefitted English language arts teachers regarding their self-efficacy as literacy instructors and their students' growth and progress as readers.

Discoveries and Assertions

Findings from the data presented in Chapter 4 indicate English language arts teachers do not feel adequately prepared or supported to teach their students to become better readers. Many of the teachers who participated in this study feel school and district leadership support the idea of reading instruction across content areas, but that a clear vision of literacy instruction is lacking, as are adequate resources to support such an initiative. The findings also suggest that English language arts teachers are not adequately prepared or trained to teach literacy, and they face a myriad of challenges in the classroom that inhibit them from helping their students to grow as readers, such as student apathy and highly varied reading levels among their students. Despite these difficulties, however, the findings from this study suggest that teachers working collaboratively to better their practice of literacy instruction can, in fact, improve their practice to a degree that students produce notable and significant gains in their reading comprehension abilities when exposed to direct and explicit reading comprehension instruction on an ongoing and regular basis.

Following the data analyses outlined in the previous chapter, I triangulated my data to interpret and construct warranted assertions in response to my research questions. According to Boyle (2006), warranted assertions “merge truth and inquiry together” for the purpose of “interdependency of truths and the processes of inquiry” (p. 7-8). From the results of my data analysis, I present three assertions, based upon the research questions that guided this study:

1. Direct and explicit reading comprehension strategy instruction provided to freshman English students on a regular basis may increase their performance on reading diagnostic tests and reading achievement measures.
2. Regular collaboration among freshman English teachers increases effective reading comprehension strategy instruction in freshman English language arts classes and functions to increase teachers’ efficacy as literacy instructors.
3. Secondary language arts teachers select and infuse reading comprehension strategy instruction based upon their self-efficacies as literacy instructors and the perceived benefits such strategies will have for their students.

Student Performance

I administered the 7 Minute Reading Test to all of my students during the first week of the study, as did the other innovation participants. Based on this assessment, we determined that approximately 90% of our students read below a ninth grade level, and approximately 50% of our students read below a seventh grade level. This correlated with data from the reading placement test students took before enrolling at Encanto High School. Approximately 21% of our students were also enrolled in a READ 180 class.

These statistics, while daunting, are on par with research data that indicate approximately half of students in high poverty, urban high schools read below a sixth or seventh grade level (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). The teachers who participated in this study knew the challenges would be steep and the demands to their pedagogical practices would be high, but all were intent on helping their students become better, more strategic readers. Research on urban education has concluded that students who attend high poverty, urban schools perform and achieve at levels lower than their suburban counterparts, with much of the research focus being on reading and math. Yet despite this growing body of research, few practical solutions to solve the problem of low reading abilities are presented. The hope of this study was to show that ongoing and regular intervention would benefit our students and their abilities to comprehend a text. The results are encouraging.

Data from the 7 Minute Reading Test intimate the reading interventions integrated into the innovation may contribute to an increase in freshman students' reading levels. As evidenced on the 7 Minute Reading Test, during the 14 weeks of the study the student participants raised their reading abilities an average of 0.90 grade levels, with some students showing gains of two grade levels or more. The 30 student participants were all enrolled in a freshman English class, whose teacher, in keeping with the innovation for this action research, directed part of his or her daily instruction to explicit reading comprehension strategies. Students learned such tactics as how to build background knowledge, examine and chart expository structures, and use writing as vehicle to make connections to a text.

During individual interviews, students reported their reading challenge to contextualize or make sense of the topic of an assigned text since their background knowledge on the subject is frequently limited or non-existent. They also noted, however, that the reading strategies they had learned in their English language arts classes were proving useful to their overall reading comprehension abilities. As one student stated, “The background about the story is helpful to understand what we’re reading. You might not understand right away when you start reading the story, but the discussions help.” The careful addition of pre-reading strategies to literature studies is a necessary component to comprehension. Schema theory states “readers can comprehend the text only if they reconstruct its content by relating their own schemata to the new information in the text,” (Mihara, 2011, p. 52) which underscores its importance to literacy instruction, and which has been further evidenced by student response.

Reactions from teachers following the conclusion of the study also speak to the performance gains made by student participants, not just in their reading levels but also in their engagement and commitment to the texts. “If you want to get a kid excited,” says one of the innovation participants, “you have to start that before he reads to get him fired up.” The innovation participant noted that the increased use of pre-reading strategies in his classes succeed in motivating students to read and comprehend the literature pieces he assigns because they help “get them excited to pay attention.” Goodman, in his 1970’s reading research, viewed reading as “guessing game” in which reader reconstructs, as best as he can, a message which has been encoded by a writer” (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983, p. 554). If this is truly the case, the reading comprehension strategies that were

taught to our freshman students were effective in doing just that. By the end of the study, the evidence was strong that our work toward improved reading comprehension paid off.

Individual interviews and teacher observations showed that ongoing reading comprehension strategy instruction occurred regularly in the innovation participants' classrooms throughout the study. And while it is possible to only speculate what occurred in the innovation participants' classes prior, the data from the focus group interviews and the TSLI suggest that regular use of strategy instruction did not occur before the innovation was implemented. I can speak to my own experiences as a classroom teacher and say with certainty that I did not regularly infuse literacy instruction into my lessons in the past. I was unsure of the best techniques to help my students become readers, and I was not convinced that anything I could do would help them. The execution of the intervention, however, forced me to integrate literacy instruction into my own practice, and the innovation participants followed my lead and did the same. Further study is needed to advance these findings, but it is satisfying to think that we have helped students improve their reading skills much later in their education than often occurs.

As we move farther into the 21st Century, the need for a labor force of proficient readers continues to grow (Jacobs, 2008). Secondary teachers hold the goal for preparing students to succeed in the world beyond high school, but any volume of content knowledge becomes less relevant if students cannot understand what they read. In addition to critical thinking skills and math aptitude, students "must know how to learn from reading" since "text becomes the major, if not the primary source of knowledge" (Alfassi, 2004, p. 171). Apparently, many students, especially those in urban schools, are not prepared to meet the challenges they will face academically and otherwise because

they do not come to high school reading at grade levels that will allow them to prosper. Simply sounding the alarms is not enough; teachers must take action to remedy this problem. The findings from this study suggest a remedy consisting of simple reading comprehension strategies in daily lessons may make a significant difference in students' reading abilities and their performance in English language arts classes.

Teacher Collaboration

According to Wray (2004), literacy is vital to all content areas, but when students enter secondary schools, they find that each school subject makes specific and unique demands to literacy that are essential to constructing knowledge within that discipline. As stated previously, content area teachers, including English language arts teachers, may be reluctant to engage in reading comprehension strategy instruction, and may also be reluctant to engage in professional development activities to better their practice. During the focus group interviews, several teachers expressed their distaste for the professional development offerings about literacy they have encountered, stating that the workshops they have attended do not offer practical approaches to meet the needs of their students. "No one asks teachers what might work," said an interview participant. Another teacher agreed, saying, "The administration isn't willing to try new things or listen to teachers; they have a set idea of what works. They are not open to new ideas; they are inflexible and out of touch."

Understanding that the current methods to literacy training were not well received by teachers led me to the decision to devise a collaborative approach to reading comprehension instruction. Rather than engage teachers in traditional professional development activities that dictate methods and practice, a collaborative approach was

conceived for this study in the hopes it would prove more effective as a teacher-instruction model. According to Stockton and Morran (2010), “In an ideal world, theory informs practice, and practice refines theory, which then is tested and validated through research” (p. 296). Teachers do not wish to be given a litany of “one-size-fits-all” techniques to teach reading, especially when they know those techniques will not work well in their own classrooms. Working with a small group of innovation participants offered me the opportunity to listen to their concerns and their experiences in order to collaboratively uncover reading strategies grounded in research that might work well in our specific contexts.

The teacher participants in this study faced similar challenges of teaching struggling readers in their freshman English classes, and it was important to make the professional development piece of the innovation meaningful and relevant. In order for professional development to be effective, it must be “grounded in the work teachers do in support of student learning goals, engage teachers in inquiry and reflection, be collaborative, supported, and ongoing, and be meaningfully connected to other school and district initiatives” (Nelson & Slavit, 2008, p. 102). As such, the teacher participants work together to develop instructional methods and practices to improve their students’ reading comprehension abilities that easily merge with their day-to-day lesson planning and instruction.

Evidence suggests that effective professional development should “involve the creation of opportunities for teachers to engage as learners, build pedagogical and disciplinary knowledge, and co-construct and enact new visions of practice in context” (Linn, Shear, Bell, & Slotta, 1999; Loucks-Horsley, Hewson, Love, & Stiles, 1998;

Putnam & Borko, 2000; Radinsky, Bouillion, Lento, & Gomez, 2001, as cited in Nelson & Slavit, 2008, p. 100). These findings supported the collaborative approach to teacher inquiry for this study. As a research practitioner, I worked closely with my teacher participants to develop a plan for implementing reading comprehension strategy instruction. Rather than attempt to refine our teaching practices individually, the innovation participants and I collaborated frequently and informally through conversations during prep periods, after school hours, and through electronic means such as email.

Teachers often work in isolation, and collaboration does not occur under normal circumstances; however, when teachers work together “to pose and answer questions informed by data from their own students, their knowledge grows and their practice changes” (David, 2009). My teacher participants and I individually strive to improve our instruction and help our students become better readers, but we found when we worked together, our approach to that improvement shifted and became easier. Through frequent communication, both face-to-face and electronically, we became better equipped to continue and hone our interventions. Steered by our curiosity and desire to improve our students’ reading abilities, rather than by school and district mandates, our collaborative inquiry allowed us to become our own guides. The student data we examined afforded us the opportunity to construct our own knowledge and frames of thought regarding our approaches to literacy instruction. This level of autonomy harkens back to the constructivist approach which guides this study. This methodology made our own learning more meaningful than it might have been had we been handed lesson plans targeted at reading comprehension strategies (Bevevino, et al., 1999).

The collaborative approach to professional development was well received among the innovation participants, some of whom had stated previously they felt most options for literacy professional development would be of little or no use to them. These teachers balked at attending workshops given by an outside “expert” who had limited knowledge of their students and their current challenges in the classroom. They stated they did not seek out these professional development opportunities because they did not trust them to be an effective use of their time, especially if their voices were not heard and their concerns not addressed. Collaborative inquiry allowed the innovation participants to become the focus of the professional development sessions that were part of the innovation. I, as the research practitioner, was seen as the expert in the field of literacy whose goal was to guide and inform, rather than to dictate practice. Every teacher who participated had a voice and was solicited for input. No “one-size-fits-all” approaches were taken to instructional practice, and the innovation participants were allowed to construct their own paradigm of literacy instruction specific to their classrooms. This helped to create the necessary buy-in from the teachers, which ultimately benefited our students and their reading comprehension abilities. Said one innovation participant about his enlarged arsenal of reading comprehension strategies, “I don’t just tell kids to read something and answer these questions if they don’t get it. I think there is enough there that they are gaining some ground and making progress in my class by end of year.”

Teacher Efficacy

The teacher participants in this study do not view themselves as reading teachers, and most do not feel qualified to address the reading needs of their students. Teachers reported being frustrated and overwhelmed by the lack of reading comprehension skills

they encounter in their English language arts classrooms, but lack the self-efficacy needed to take action to learn how to help their students become better readers. English language arts teachers do not see themselves as reading teachers; instead, most consider themselves to be experts in literature and strive to impart a love of prose and poetry in their students. They are often thwarted, however, when they find many of their students struggle to comprehend basic texts, let alone find an appreciation for the subtle nuances of characterization or clever uses of symbols in classical writing. Without adequate training in literacy instruction, the frustration these teachers feel will likely continue throughout their years in the classroom. The trend of low literacy among urban high school students will not improve as long as teachers believe there is nothing that can be done to improve it. Early research regarding teacher efficacy suggested that teachers with high levels of effectiveness believed they could “control, or at least strongly influence, student achievement and motivation,” (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, and Hoy, 1998, p. 202) which remains an important factor in literacy instruction. If teachers do not believe their students can become better readers, and if they also believe they cannot provide the necessary tools to assist their students improve their reading, they will likely not see students’ reading levels progress.

One of the foundations of this study was to help English teachers increase their efficacy as literacy instructors and assist them in finding ways to integrate their skills in reading instruction easily into the English language arts curriculum about which they are passionate. Tschannen-Moran, et al., (1998) define efficacy as, “a cognitive process in which people construct beliefs about their capacity to perform at a given level of attainment” (p. 203). A lack of self-efficacy diminishes teachers’ effectiveness and

impedes student achievement. This unfortunate chain of events made it necessary to raise the efficacies of my innovation participants to a level that would provide them the confidence they needed to be effective literacy teachers.

Nearly all educators have heard it said that every teacher is a reading teacher, no matter the content area in which one focuses. The cries of researchers and school leaders to infuse reading instruction in every secondary classroom have fallen on deaf ears, since they do little to empower teachers to be effective in their literacy instruction. Teachers already bear the burden of high stakes testing, grade reporting, and student discipline, so it is not unreasonable to think they would ignore such a declaration in light of everything else required. For this innovation to succeed, I knew I would have to find a way to endow my teachers not only with the skills they need to teach reading, but also with the confidence that would allow them to reach their students.

Working collaboratively with teachers to plan instruction benefited all of us. Not only did it give us the chance to share our experiences and ideas about reading instruction, it also ensured that our new instructional strategies would not create an additional burden on an already overtaxed group. We also worked to ensure that the strategies we chose to infuse into our teaching would provide immediate benefits that would be noticed by both teacher and student. In doing so, teachers quickly raised their self-efficacy regarding reading instruction and maintained it throughout the study as they saw the continued progress their students made as readers. This was a cyclical process. The more teachers saw their students improve, the more they perceived the usefulness of their reading comprehension strategy instruction. They greatly increased their commitment to the innovation the more they saw themselves as capable literacy teachers.

The greater their commitment to the innovation, the harder they worked to ensure that they instilled literacy instruction into their daily lessons, which, in turn, led to greater student improvement.

Following the conclusion of the study, the innovation participants had the opportunity to share their perceptions of the innovation and any newfound insights they had attained. “For the most part, yes,” one innovation participant answered when he was asked if he now felt prepared to meet the literacy needs of his students. “I’m not going to say everything I do is perfect, but with the resources I have and the knowledge and experience I have, I feel prepared to deal with the students who come into my class who are reading at various levels.” His sentiments were shared among all of the innovation participants. Each of them stated they had made strides in their literacy instruction abilities and had increased their self-efficacy to the degree that they now feel more able to assist their students in becoming better readers.

Findings from the individual interviews suggest that this increased efficacy came as a result of the perceptible gains they saw in their students. “I think they respond positively because it made them approach reading and literature in way they hadn’t done before, and look at in a different way,” said another innovation participant, who also stated that prior to participating in this study she felt as though she seldom felt her literacy instruction was effective. She reported that when she began to see noticeable gains in the reading achievement of her students, as measured by the 7 Minute Reading Test, she knew something she was doing resonated with her students. “Looking at the data makes it seem that it was beneficial,” she added.

When teacher efficacy is related to student achievement outcomes, as research suggests, English language arts teachers who feel capable and confident in their prowess as literacy instructors stand a greater chance of impacting their students' reading abilities than those who are not so efficacious (Tschannen-Moran, et al., 1998). Empowering English language arts teachers to think of themselves as more than literature and writing teachers was an objective this study seems to have met. This, in turn, might have contributed to the increases noted in student reading levels and the confidence teachers exuded in the individual interviews when asked to describe their expertise in reading comprehension strategy instruction. The innovation participants, myself included, completed this study with many more methods of instruction at our disposal and much greater self-assurance in our capabilities to use them effectively.

As the following chapter will discuss, I hope the lessons learned from this innovation will continue to inspire English language arts teachers to regularly infuse literacy instruction in their classrooms. The love of literature drives many of us to teach English, and providing our students with the tools to understand that literature leads to greater satisfaction in the classroom for teachers and their students.

Chapter 6

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As a classroom teacher for 11 years, I was well aware of the issues students in urban high schools face regarding their reading abilities. I also shared the frustrations felt by many of the teachers who participated in this study. When I began teaching, my love was literature not literacy, and I had little interest in integrating reading comprehension strategies into my instruction. I did not have an idea of where to start. Over time, I realized that there was a bigger problem in my classroom than I originally believed, and it did not matter the grade level I taught. Freshmen to seniors, across the board I saw students struggle with reading, and I finally concluded that I would never impart my love of literature to my students as long as they could not understand what I was asking them to read. Out of that realization, this innovation was born.

This chapter offers a discussion of ideas, themes, and realizations which grew out of the data analysis and which were informed by the existing scholarship. The purpose is to discuss the conclusion of this work, its limitations, its implications for practice, and its implications for further research. Finally, it seeks to briefly describe the journey taken by the innovation participants during the study.

Confab

The reasons for this study were personal. As an English language arts teacher, I grew tired of watching my students struggle with reading comprehension skills and frustrated that they were not able to enjoy an assigned text because they could not understand it. When I began my career as a high school teacher, I assumed my students would be prepared to read grade-level texts and that reading instruction would not be a

part of my regular lessons. I held onto this hope for many years until I realized I was doing everyone a disservice by not addressing this issue through my instruction. I never considered myself an expert on literacy, but I figured I had to become one if I was going to create an intervention to help my students become better readers and higher achievers – in my class and in their other content area courses.

This study's innovation was multifaceted. While the primary purpose was to help students become better readers, it also attempted to help English language arts teachers become better literacy instructors through the process of collaborative inquiry and to increase their confidence as capable reading teachers. The innovation's approach was linked to Piaget's constructivist theory in that it allowed students and teachers to construct their own knowledge and learning models for reading comprehension. The intent was never to dictate, but rather to guide instruction to increase students' reading comprehension abilities and increase teachers' efficacy as literacy instructors in ways that worked best for the individual. These aims were deeply imbedded in the research questions around which this study was designed.

The results and findings collected from the data support the suggestion that this approach is effective for teachers and students. Quantitative data from the 7 Minute Reading Test show a noticeable increase in student reading levels, and the data triangulated from student interviews imply students use the strategies they were taught in their freshman English language arts classes to better comprehend the assigned texts. In addition, the innovation participants reported increased efficacy in their teaching abilities and noted the positive effects they have observed in their students. Said one innovation participant of the outcomes of her teaching practices, "I find that when students read with

a purpose, they grasp the reading a lot more.” The other innovation participants agreed and noted they found their participation in the study to be valuable for their students and for themselves as educators.

Limitations of the Study

While the results and findings of the study were generally positive, limitations exist that must be considered. Time was, perhaps, the largest limiter to the study since its duration was only fourteen weeks. The innovation participants agreed to engage in the intervention at end of the prior school year, but we were not able to meet until after teachers reported back to work in August. It took two weeks before we were able to develop a solid action plan in order to roll out the innovation. Once we began, the reading strategies were quickly integrated into our daily lessons, and we were able to infuse literacy instruction into our classrooms. Student progress, however, was only measured during the first semester of the school year. With a larger amount of time, it might have been possible to achieve a better understanding of how much growth students made as readers and to what degree teachers’ self-efficacy was affected by their involvement in the study.

It should also be noted that the total number of participants was relatively small. A total of 15 other teachers participated in the study, of which four, including myself, were directly involved in the innovation. Also, there were only 30 student participants, five of whom participated in individual interviews. A larger pool of teachers and students would have made it possible to generate significantly more qualitative and quantitative data to track students’ reading progress and teachers’ growth as literacy instructors.

Finally, several factors in this study remained outside of my control as a researcher. While I observed the innovation participants multiple times, I cannot say with absolute certainty that reading comprehension strategy instruction was included in every lesson, despite the fact we had resolved to do so. It is possible that once the novelty of the study wore off, teachers might have abandoned teaching and reinforcing some of the strategies we had agreed to put into place. It was also impossible to ensure that the student participants took the assessment seriously, which could have resulted in quantitative data that was less reliable. The 7 Minute Reading Test was administered three times during the fourteen weeks of the study, and while the innovation participants and I attempted to emphasize its importance to our students, it is conceivable they might have become desensitized to its significance and not put forth their best efforts each time they took the test.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study could have many potential benefits for Encanto High School and its students. The teachers who participated in the innovation were pleased with the gains they saw in their students' reading scores and appreciated the more focused approach they took to reading comprehension strategy instruction. This resulted from the collaborative professional development in which they engaged. If these strategies continue to be taught and cultivated in freshman English classrooms, the foundations for successful reading comprehension will be laid early for our students, who will hopefully transfer these skills into their future English language arts classes, as well as other content area classes in which reading is an integral part.

In the future, it might also be possible to expand the collaborative professional development model to include other teachers in the English department. Ideally, the innovation will continue forward and will include an additional grade level of teachers each year until the entire English department includes literacy instruction into regular practice. Teachers from the original group of innovation participants might take on the role of facilitator for the additional collaborative groups and introduce instructional strategies to other teachers in the department. To think in even broader terms, this type of professional development could be expanded to include other content areas. With minor modifications, content area teachers in subjects such as science, social studies, and math could integrate the same or similar reading comprehension strategies into their daily instruction. This would maximize the amount of literacy instruction Encanto High School students receive during their time with us.

Implications for Research

This action research study helped illuminate the ongoing literacy issues faced by secondary English language arts teachers and students. It also served to suggest that a focused approach to reading comprehension strategy instruction might be beneficial to improve students' reading abilities. Still, given the limitations presented, further time and research are necessary to increase the credibility and validity of the initial results. The next step in the research will be to increase the participant pool and work with more teachers and students to determine the effectiveness of this type of instruction for students and to better understand the effect of professional development through collaborative inquiry for teachers. Since this study was limited to only freshman English

language arts students and teachers, I am curious to observe its effects on students and teachers of different levels.

Eventually, I would like to roll out this type of intervention to the greater school community and work with department heads across content areas in order to educate content teachers how easily literacy instruction can be integrated into their regular lessons. It is understandable why secondary teachers shy away from reading instruction and why some of them assume it is the responsibility of English language arts teachers. As research shows, however, this mindset does not help improve students' reading ability. I believe the majority of the reading comprehension strategies used in the intervention could easily be adapted to meet the needs of other content area teachers, and I would like to study their implementation across subject areas to determine their effectiveness in other classes.

While this study helped to answer several questions related to student reading achievement and teacher self-efficacy as literacy instructors, it also generated other questions for future investigation. Statistical evidence from the TSLI suggests teachers with fewer years of classroom experience feel more qualified to teach literacy than their more seasoned counterparts. If researched further, it might be possible to determine a relationship between the perceived effectiveness of past teacher preparation programs compared to more recent programs. It might also indicate younger teachers to be more in touch with student literacy needs beyond the classroom, giving them greater efficacy regarding reading instruction if they feel they know how best to prepare their students for college and career.

The Journey

None of the teachers who participated in the study were brand new to the profession, and each of the innovation participants had no fewer than five years of teaching experience. All of us had ample time to become set in our instructional methods and feel the burden of the many other obligations and pressures that come with teaching. Therefore, it was remarkable to have the opportunity to work with a group of teachers who were so willing to try new approaches, even if that meant taking on additional work to change their established practices and commit their precious time to collaborative inquiry. Though our time was short, the journey toward becoming better literacy instructors was profound. Through the use of collaborative inquiry, all of the innovation participants, including myself, experienced increased self-efficacy as teachers and were inspired by our students' gains in their reading abilities.

“Participating in this study raised my consciousness and caused me to be more mindful of my teaching practices and why I do what I do,” said one of the innovation participants when asked about the journey she took as a literacy teacher. She went on to explain that the method of collaborative inquiry “reminded me to be aware of those practices, and to be on guard against engaging in activities just for the sake of being active or because they are what I have always done.” Being more mindful of practice and choosing instructional devices that best meet the needs of students was an important component of this study. I, too, became much more mindful of the choices I made in my classroom and learned to ask myself if what I was doing was the best choice to help my students learn to read more effectively.

Another participant spoke of the benefits well-chosen reading strategies can have on students. “I always just did the activity hoping that it helped my students and figuring that it did,” she said. “I never really evaluated the outcomes of my top-down, bottom-up approaches and your study helped me to focus on that particular area.” It is easy for teachers to become occupied with their many responsibilities and lose sight of the importance of self-reflection. The regular meetings and communication that took place during the study afforded the innovation participants time to reflect on the effectiveness of their pedagogical choices for teaching reading, and that reflection, in turn, allowed all of us the chance to revise and modify those choices to best meet our students’ needs. Said another participant, “Being more aware has allowed me to share the reasoning behind the chosen lesson to my students, helping them to also see the connection between what we are doing and their increased comprehension abilities.”

Closing Word

The first time I met the principal of Encanto High School he reminded me that we are not teachers of content; we are teachers of students. I took these words to heart as I made my way through the sometimes jumbled mess of research and theory in order to distill the components of literacy instruction that would have the greatest impact on our students. I kept my focus on learning, which “affects not only the way that teachers work together but also the way that they relate to and work with each student” (DuFour, 2002, p. 13). The students remained at the center of this study. Teacher participation and efficacy, as well as teacher learning, were also important pieces, but it was the students for whom this innovation was designed.

Change is never easy, and I for one tend to shy away from changes to my habits and practice; however, I saw the time had come, at least in my small corner of the world. Thanks in part to my recent study of leadership for change, coupled with my own increased self-awareness and desire to make positive changes in my school, I felt confident I could take on this project and make a difference. So, no matter how much work this innovation proved to be, I was ready to lead the force to ensure that Encanto High School students have the opportunity to leave high school with the skills to find success no matter what paths they choose once they leave our tutelage. Urban school children face issues that are incomprehensible to many, and as their teachers, we strive to provide them with tools that will allow them to build better lives for themselves. In my mind there are few tools more powerful than literacy. Said abolitionist Frederick Douglass, "Once you learn to read, you will be forever free." It is too soon to tell if this innovation truly set our students free, but one can hope they have taken the first steps to the new world that awaits them in reading.

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Table 1

Quantitative Data Sources Inventory

Data Source	Description	Contents
Teacher Survey of Literacy Instruction (TSLI)	This survey was designed to determine teachers' perceptions of their school and district's focus on literacy development as well as their own self efficacies a literacy teacher. The TSLI was administered in September 2012 at the beginning of the study.	30 survey items to measure four constructs, plus demographic information.
The 7 Minute Reading Test	Multiple choice test designed to determine students' reading levels. The 7 Minute Reading Test was administered three times during the study: at the beginning, the midpoint, and the end.	30-question multiple choice reading comprehension assessment.

Table 2

Qualitative Data Sources Inventory

Data Source	Description	Contents
Focus Group Interviews	Three focus group interviews were conducted with three to four teachers each, from the English departments at Encanto High School, as well as other English departments throughout the district.	14 pages of summary transcription.
Field Notes	Each of the innovation participants, including the researcher, was observed teaching a literature lesson twice throughout the study, for a total of ten observations.	25 pages of observational notes.
Teacher Interviews	Each of the three innovation participants was interviewed individually at the conclusion of the study.	10 pages of direct transcription.
Student Interviews	Five students, who were also included in the student focus groups, were interviewed to gain their perceptions of reading and reading instruction.	10 pages of direct transcription.

Table 3

Collaborative Leadership and School Capacity

N=15

Item		Response Frequency Percent				
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
Q6.	The administration's role in improving the school's literacy opportunities is clearly evident.	00.0	40.0	60.0	00.0	00.0
Q7.	School leaders support integration of literacy instruction across content areas.	00.0	80.0	6.7	6.7	6.7
Q8.	School leaders and staff members believe the teaching of reading is their responsibility.	00.0	46.7	46.7	00.0	6.7
Q.9	Adequate resources are provided to support literacy improvement.	00.0	33.3	33.3	33.3	00.0
Q.10	Data-driven decision-making guides literacy improvement planning.	00.0	33.3	40.0	20.0	6.7
Q.11	Scheduling structures are in place to support identified literacy needs of all students.	00.0	53.3	26.7	20.0	00.0
Q.12	Scheduling structures are in place to support literacy professional development.	00.0	40.0	40.0	20.0	00.0

Table 4

Content Literacy

N=15

Descriptive Response Statistics			
Item		Mean	Std. Deviation
Q17.	Teachers provide appropriate assessment for learning/reading.	2.47	.83
Q13.	Teachers attend professional development sessions to learn reading instructional strategies for their respective content areas, including English language arts.	2.27	.46
Q14.	Teachers understand and routinely use instructional reading strategies in their daily lesson plans.	2.27	1.03
Q15.	Teachers provide frequent and appropriate instruction to inform students as to how they can best use the textbook clues.	2.27	1.03
Q18.	It is evident in classrooms that reading in content areas is a school-wide goal.	2.13	.52
Q16.	Teachers provide instructional strategies for effective student reading of outside sources such as Internet sites, journal and media sources, and reference books.	2.00	1.13
Q19.	It is evident that students understand and use their content area reading strategies.	1.80	.56

Table 5

Teacher Self-Efficacy

N=15

Descriptive Response Statistics			
Item		Mean	Std. Deviation
Q30.	Reading comprehension skills should be taught across content areas in secondary classrooms, not just in English language arts.	3.50	.65
Q29.	Secondary education teachers of all content areas have as much responsibility to teach reading strategies as their elementary school teacher counterparts.	3.47	.64
Q28.	I feel secondary English language arts teachers have a responsibility to teach reading and literacy instruction as part of their daily lessons.	3.40	.63
Q27.	I feel qualified to address most of the reading challenges my students face.	2.47	.64
Q26.	My college teacher preparation program trained me to adequately teach literacy strategies in my secondary classroom.	2.40	.91

Table 6

Perceived Ability to Address Students' Reading Challenges as Indicated by Year of Teaching

N=15

Years Taught	n	Mean	Standard Deviation
0-5	3	2.50	0.00
6-10	4	2.16	0.70
11-15	4	3.00	0.00
16-20	1	2.00	N/A
20+	3	2.00	0.64

Table 7

Mean Reading Levels of Student Participants at Each Administration of the 7 Minute Reading Test

	N=30		
	1 st Administration of 7 Minute Reading Test	2 nd Administration of 7 Minute Reading Test	3 rd Administration of 7 Minute Reading Test
Mean	7.37	7.59	8.24
Std. Deviation	1.20	1.17	1.43

Table 8

Average Growth of Reading Levels of Student Participants by Initial Reading Scores

	N=30		
	Tier 1: 6 th Grade Reading Level	Tier 1: 7 th Grade Reading Level	Tier 1: 8 th Grade Reading Level
Average Growth of Student Reading Level	+1.17	+0.65	+0.81

Table 9

Average Growth of Reading Levels of Student Participants by Teacher

N=30			
Researcher n=15	Teacher #1 n=5	Teacher #2 n=5	Teacher #3 n=5
+1.13 grade levels	+0.82 grade levels	+0.40 grade levels	+0.64 grade levels

APPENDIX A

SUGGESTED READING STRATEGIES

Reading Strategies: Weeks 1 & 2

Pre-Reading	During Reading	Post Reading
<p>Pictures/Images Find images related to the text to be studied and show them to students using the LCD projector. Images can include landscapes, objects, dress, artwork, or anything else related to the literature.</p> <p>Allow students the opportunity to share their perceptions, observations, and to ask questions related to the images shown. This activity can be self-contained or can transition into a pre-reading class discussion.</p>	<p>Graphic Organizers Graphic organizers are a means of helping students relate the new reading material to something they already know. Instruct students how to complete the graphic organizer and have them fill it out while they read.</p> <p>You may use the graphic organizers included in the textbook's resource materials or use one of the examples I have included. A Google search for "graphic organizers" also yields a staggering number of results.</p>	<p>RAP Research has shown paraphrasing to be an effective post-reading strategy. It can be completed at the end of the entire reading passage or can be used in sections.</p> <p>After students have read the selection (or a section) have them ask themselves, "What was the main idea?" They may record their response along with two details on paper and then paraphrase the passage. This can also be done orally or on whiteboards.</p>
<p>Class Discussion Prepare a short list of questions related to the topic of the literature. Questioning can be kept informal and casual or can be more formal and structured based upon the teacher's preference. Class discussion can be a strictly oral activity or students can write their thoughts in various formats.</p>	<p>Study Guide Study guides give students specific tasks to do while reading. They can include answering specific questions (such as those included in the textbook's resource materials), completing timelines and plot diagrams, outlining, or defining difficult words, terms, or concepts.</p> <p>Feel free to use the materials included with the textbook or one of the examples I have included.</p>	<p>Writing Extension Following the completion of the reading selection, instruct students to complete a written extension activity. This may include, but is not limited to, a personal response, a summary, or an explanation of author's purpose. The writing extension can be composed in first or third person and should include specific details from the text.</p>

Reading Strategies: Weeks 3 & 4

Pre-Reading	During Reading	Post Reading
<p>Semantic Mapping Create semantic maps to link what students already know with the material they will encounter in the text. This helps to link prior knowledge with vocabulary and concepts to be studied in the text.</p> <p>You may use one of the attached semantic maps or search Google for a myriad of semantic maps and templates available online.</p>	<p>Self-Questioning Self-questioning has been found to be an effective during-reading strategy based upon students' observed comprehension gains</p> <p>Instruct students to jot down two questions about the text while we read as a class; the questions can be related to any literary elements being studied (i.e. character motivation, setting, plot). During pauses in reading, call upon students to read one of their questions and then discuss the answer as a class.</p>	<p>RAP Research has shown paraphrasing to be an effective post-reading strategy. It can be completed at the end of the entire reading passage or can be used in sections.</p> <p>After students have read the selection (or a section) have them ask themselves, "What was the main idea?" They may record their response along with two details on paper and then paraphrase the passage. This can also be done orally or on whiteboards.</p>
<p>Class Discussion Choose a key word or phrase from the text to be studied and work as a class to define its meaning and/or possible relevance to the text.</p>	<p>Graphic Organizers Graphic organizers are a means of helping students relate the new reading material to something they already know. Instruct students how to complete the graphic organizer and have them fill it out while they read.</p> <p>You may use the graphic organizers included in the textbook's resource materials or use one of the examples I have included. A Google search for "graphic organizers" also yields a staggering number of results.</p>	<p>Writing Extension Following the completion of the reading selection, instruct students to complete a written extension activity. This may include, but is not limited to, a personal response, a summary, or an explanation of author's purpose. The writing extension can be composed in first or third person and should include specific details from the text.</p>

Reading Strategies: Weeks 5 & 6

Pre-Reading	During Reading	Post Reading
<p>Building Background Teach vocabulary in context by selecting a few key terms from the text and asking students to complete a matching activity, dictation, or creating a word wall. A few, well-chosen vocabulary words are all that is needed for this activity; save the larger vocabulary practice for a post-reading activity.</p>	<p>Graphic Organizers for Expository Structure Completing graphic organizers while reading to show expository structures such as cause and effect or chronological order can be an effective during-reading strategy, as well, providing students a better understanding of what might come next or what information they should be looking for while they read.</p> <p>Feel free to sample the attached file, which includes graphic organizers for several different types of expository structures.</p>	<p>Extension Activities Extension activities take students beyond what they have read and require more critical thinking and reading. Strategies include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role play • Visual Creations • News Stories • Comic Strips • Talk Show Host
<p>Class Discussion Choose a key word or phrase from the text to be studied and work as a class to define its meaning and/or possible relevance to the text.</p>	<p>Predicting Predicting also assists students in becoming active readers who are able to construct meaning from a text while they read. This can be done formally or informally during reading. A predicting journal is attached, which can be easily modified to fit the needs of the teacher, students, and the text.</p>	<p>Summarizing Summarizing enables students to identify writer's main ideas, recognize the purpose or intent of the selection, distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information, note the evidence for support of main ideas, detect the organizational pattern of the author, and follow material sequentially.</p>

Reading Strategies: Weeks 7 & 8

Pre-Reading	During Reading	Post Reading
<p>Brainstorming Examine the title of the selection you are about to read List all the information that comes to mind about this title Use these pieces of information to recall and understand the material. Use this knowledge to reframe or reorder what you know, or to note what you disagree with, for further research.</p> <p>This can be done as a whole class or in small groups. Students may share out and record their ideas on their whiteboard or the teacher may record them on the whiteboard or Smart Board.</p>	<p>Concept Maps A concept map help students visualize various connections between words or phrases and a main idea. Most are comprised of words or phrases surrounded by a circle or square that connect to one another and ultimately back to the main idea through graphic lines. These lines help students to "negotiate meaning" (Hyerle, 1996) as they read and make the meaning connections between the main idea and other information.</p>	<p>RAP Research has shown paraphrasing to be an effective post-reading strategy. It can be completed at the end of the entire reading passage or can be used in sections.</p> <p>After students have read the selection (or a section) have them ask themselves, "What was the main idea?" They may record their response along with two details on paper and then paraphrase the passage. This can also be done orally or on whiteboards.</p>
<p>Pre-Questioning You can also write out a series of questions you expect to be answered when reading:</p> <p>Definition: <i>What is....? Where does ... fit? What group does ... belong to?</i> Characteristics: <i>How would I describe...? What does ... look like? What are its parts?</i> Examples: <i>What is a good example of...? What are similar examples that share attributes but differ in some way?</i> Experience: <i>What experience have I had with? What can I imagine about ...?</i></p>	<p>Paired Reading The Paired Reading strategy encourages peer teaching and learning. Students are divided into pairs and read along together or take turns reading aloud to each other. Pairs can have the same reading ability or can include a more fluent reader with a less fluent reader. Each student reads and provides feedback about their own and their partner's reading behaviors.</p>	<p>Writing Extension Following the completion of the reading selection, instruct students to complete a written extension activity. This may include, but is not limited to, a personal response, a summary, or an explanation of author's purpose. The writing extension can be composed in first or third person and should include specific details from the text.</p>

APPENDIX B

DATA COLLECTION SCHEDULE

Data Collection Schedule		
TSLI (15 Participants Needed) Completion by 9/21/2012		
Focus Group Interviews (3 Groups) Completion by October 19		
Group #1: Encanto High School English language arts teachers.	Group #2 English language arts teachers from other district schools.	Group #3: Innovation Participants.
Individual Interviews (4 Participants) Completion by December 7		
Teacher Observations (10 total) Completion by December 1		
Student Interviews (5 participants) Completion by December 7		
7 Minute Reading Test (3 administrations)		
Week of September 3, 2012	Week of October 15, 2012	Week of December 3, 2012

APPENDIX C

OVERVIEW OF DATA SOURCES

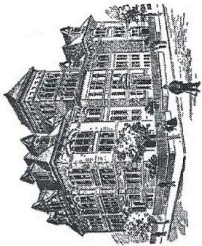
Quantitative Data Sources	
Data Source	Description
Teacher Survey of Literacy Instruction (TSLI)	This survey was designed to determine teachers' perceptions of their school and district's focus on literacy development as well as their own self efficacies a literacy teacher. The TSLI was administered in September 2012 at the beginning of the study.
7 Minute Reading Test	Multiple choice test designed to determine students' reading levels. The 7 Minute Reading Test was administered three times during the study: at the beginning, the midpoint, and the end.
Qualitative Data Sources	
Data Sources	Description
Focus Group Interviews	Three focus group interviews were conducted with three to four teachers each, from the English departments at Encanto High School, as well as other English departments throughout the district.
Field Notes	Each of the innovation participants, including the researcher, was observed teaching a literature lesson twice throughout the study, for a total of ten observations.
Teacher Interviews	Each of the innovation participants was interviewed individually at the conclusion of the study.
Student Interviews	Five students, who were also included in the student focus groups, were interviewed to gain their perceptions of reading and reading instruction.

APPENDIX D

TEACHER SURVEY OF LITERACY INSTRUCTION

Teacher Survey of Literacy Instruction

Jeffrey S. Williams, Doctoral Student | Arizona State University



Dear esteemed colleague:

As English teachers, we know that literacy skills are one of the most important indicators of student success, both in our English language arts classes and across content areas. I am surveying you using this questionnaire to determine your perceptions of your school and school district's focus on literacy development, as well as your own self-efficacy as a literacy teacher.

The following questionnaire consists of 30 questions and should take you no more than 15 minutes to complete. Once you have completed the survey, please return it to me via email. Thank you in advance for your participation in my research.

Part I: Demographic Information	ID Number:
1. What is your gender?	2. In what year were you born?
3. For how many years have you taught in a secondary school?	4. Please specify your ethnicity.
5. What is the highest level of schooling you have completed?	

Part II: Collaborative Leadership and School Capacity Thinking about your school, how much do you agree or disagree with the following? For each statement, please check the appropriate box. ¹		QUALITY RATING				
		Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Don't Know
6.	The administrations role in improving the school's literacy opportunities is clearly evident.					
7.	School leaders support integration of literacy instruction across content areas.					
8.	School leaders and staff members believe the teaching of reading is their responsibility.					
9.	Adequate resources are provided to support literacy improvement.					
10.	Data-driven decision-making guides literacy improvement planning.					
11.	Scheduling structures are in place to support identified literacy needs of all students.					
12.	Scheduling structures are in place to support literacy professional development.					
Additional Comments						

¹ Adapted from the AIM for Literacy Survey developed by the West Virginia Department of Education (2008)

Part III: Content Literacy		QUALITY RATING			
Thinking about your school, how much do you agree or disagree with the following? For each statement, please check the appropriate box. ²		Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
					Don't Know
13.	Teachers attend professional development sessions to learn reading instructional strategies for their respective content areas, including English language arts.				
14.	Teachers understand and routinely use instructional reading strategies in their daily lesson plans.				
15.	Teachers provide frequent and appropriate instruction to inform students as to how they can best use the textbook clues.				
16.	Teachers provide instructional strategies for effective student reading of outside sources such as Internet sites, journal and media sources, and reference books.				
17.	Teachers provide appropriate assessment for learning/reading.				
18.	It is evident in classrooms that reading in content areas is a school-wide goal.				
19.	It is evident that students understand and use their content area reading strategies.				
Additional comments:					

² Adapted from the AIM for Literacy Survey developed by the West Virginia Department of Education (2008)

Part IV: Professional Development to Support Literacy		QUALITY RATING			
Thinking about your school, how much do you agree or disagree with the following? For each statement, please check the appropriate box. ³		Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)
					Don't Know
20.	Professional development plans are based on identified student literacy needs.				
21.	Reflective teaching and self-assessment of instructional practices provide direction as to ongoing literacy professional planning (individual and school).				
22.	Content-area teachers, including English language arts, receive professional development to learn literacy strategies.				
23.	Teachers with literacy expertise and experience serve as models and mentors to less experienced colleagues.				
24.	Teachers participate in shared-teaching sessions to learn and refine literacy strategies.				
25.	Content-area teachers, including English language arts, receive ongoing, job-embedded professional development to learn instructional/literacy strategies.				
Additional comments:					

³ Adapted from the AIM for Literacy Survey developed by the West Virginia Department of Education (2008)

Part V: Teacher Self-Efficacy How well does each of the following statements describe you? For each statement, please check the appropriate box.		QUALITY RATING				
		Strongly Agree (4)	Agree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Don't Know
26.	My college teacher preparation program trained me to adequately teach literacy strategies in my secondary classroom.					
27.	I feel qualified to address most of the reading challenges my students face.					
28.	I feel secondary English language arts teachers have a responsibility to teach reading and literacy instruction as part of their daily lessons.					
29.	Secondary education teachers of all content areas have as much responsibility to teach reading strategies as their elementary school teacher counterparts.					
30.	Reading comprehension skills should be taught across content areas in secondary classrooms, not just in English language arts.					
Additional comments:						

APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Literacy Instruction in Secondary English Language Arts Classes
MODERATOR'S GUIDE

(2 pages)

Introduction (1 minute)	<p>Hello. I think you all know me, but I'm Jeffrey Williams, and I'd like to start off by thanking each of you for taking time to come today. We'll be here for about an hour.</p> <p>The reason we're here today is to get your opinions and attitudes about issues related to literacy instruction in secondary English language arts classes.</p> <p>I'll be leading today's discussion. I am not here to convince you of anything or try to sway your opinion. My job is just to ask you questions and then encourage and moderate our discussion.</p>
Procedures (2 minutes)	<p>To allow our conversation to flow more freely, I'd like to go over some procedures.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Please talk one at a time and avoid side conversations.2. Everyone doesn't have to answer every single question, but I'd like to hear from each of you today as the discussion progresses.3. This will be an open discussion, so please feel free to comment on each other's remarks.4. I'm not looking for right or wrong answers. I would like to hear what's true for you based on your own opinions and experiences. Try not to be persuaded or swayed by others, but if you change your mind, please let me know.5. If you need a break, please feel free to take care of your needs at any time.

Questions:

Please state your name and how long you have been a secondary English language arts teacher.

How do you define literacy instruction?

What are the needs and challenges your students face regarding literacy?

How does school and district leadership support literacy instruction at the high school level?

How do you define literacy instruction?

What are the needs and challenges your students face regarding literacy?

How does school and district leadership support literacy instruction at the high school level?

What training have you received to teach literacy instruction in your classroom?

How do you teach literacy strategies in your own classrooms?

What resources do you need to better support building literacy among your students?

How could the literacy initiative at your school be improved?

Is there anything else anyone would like to add?

APPENDIX F

TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Teacher:

1. What are the challenges you face as a teacher regarding literacy instruction?
2. How are you integrating reading comprehension strategies into your regular instruction?
3. What are the challenges you and your students are facing regarding the increased focus for reading comprehension instruction?
4. Prior to participating in this study, what are the literacy-building strategies you typically infuse into your instruction? How do you choose them?
5. What supports are in place at your school site for literacy instruction in content area classrooms, such as English language arts?
6. How could literacy instruction be improved at your school site?
7. As a secondary English language arts teacher, do you feel prepared to meet the needs of your students in regards to literacy instruction? Why or why not?
8. How do you feel your students responded to the literacy instruction you provided during the course of this study? Do you feel the increased focus for reading comprehension strategies was beneficial to your students?
9. Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX G

STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Student:

1. How do you feel about reading? Do you find it difficult or easy? Can you explain?
2. What are the challenges you face as a student regarding reading?
3. What strategies or techniques have you learned in your English class that you feel help you comprehend or understand a text? How do these particular strategies help you?
4. What could your English teacher do differently to help you become a better reader?
5. Do you feel you have become a better reader since the beginning of the school year? Why or why not?
6. Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX H

7 MINUTE READING TEST

EVALUATION EXERCISE

Paragraph Understanding
Timed (seven minutes)

Directions: Read the question. Then read the paragraph and find the answer to the question. At the end of the paragraph, draw a circle around the word which answers the question, on your answer sheet. When you finish this page, go on to the next page.

SAMPLE:

What does Tom's dog do?

Tom has a dog.

The dog runs.

has run Tom dog

Who has a cat?

Mary has two pets.

They are a cat and dog.

pets cat dog Mary

1. **What does Peter have?**

Peter is a boy.

He has a ball.

boy ball doll Peter

2. **Who is here with the car?**

Mother said, "Come, Jane.

Father is here with the car."

Jane car Mother Father

3. **Who likes the cat?**

Baby has a cat.

She does not like the cat.

Brother likes it.

Baby cat likes Brother

4. What did the boy lose?

A boy was looking for something he lost. A man said,
"I will help you find it." They found the penny in the grass.

grass nickel penny man

5. Who was the child?

Molly saw a child. She said, "What is your name?"
The child said, "My name is Betty."

Molly name Betty child

6. What doll did the little girl like most?

A little girl had two dolls. She got one this year and one last
year. She said, "I like my new doll, but I like the old doll best."

two dolls old doll new doll little girl

7. What did the farmer feed the cows?

A farmer had cows, horses, chickens and ducks. He fed the
cows and horses hay. To the chickens and ducks he fed corn.

horses corn hay duck

8. How old is Bill?

Mary is ten years old. She has little twin brothers named
Tom and Bill, and a brother Jack who is twelve years old. Tom is six.

ten twelve six eight

9. What did Father want the children to do?

Father said, "Hurry children. We shall be late for the train.
We are going to see Grandma and Grandpa."

see Grandpa to see to hurry to be late

10. Where does Bob help his father?

Bob goes to school every day except Saturday and Sunday. On
Saturday he helps his father at the store. On Sunday he and his
father go to church.

church Saturday store father every day

11. What kind of kitten did Mrs. Brown find?

Mrs. Brown found a kitten in the barnyard one winter day. The
kitten was so weak it could hardly stand. Ms. Brown took it
into the warm house and put it in to a little basket.

weak little warm barnyard house

12. Where did John go last?

John said, "I did two things today. I went to the bank after I
took my book back to the library."

bank library school today John

13. When is Alice's next music lesson?

Alice is becoming a fine musician. She practices on the piano
every day. On Tuesday and Friday she takes her music lesson.
Today is Wednesday.

Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday

14. Of what are toy animals made in Mexico?

In Mexican markets many things are on display. The tourist can buy brightly colored blankets of wool or cotton; leather shoes or purses; clay pigs, cats or rabbits; and interesting carved human figures made of wood. Many of the toy animals are painted in bright colors with funny dots and stripes.

colors wood leather clay dots and stripes

15. When did the children go for a walk?

On Tuesday it rained, so the children played indoors. Wednesday morning it was still too muddy to play outside, but their father took them for a ride in the park. Yesterday was bright and clear, and they went for a walk in the forest. They met an old woman when they had gone about a mile.

yesterday Tuesday morning in the park in the forest about a mile

16. Which rug is the most expensive?

The merchant said, "The dye used in this red rug comes from a very tiny animal. Thousands of animals are necessary to make even a small amount of dye. For the reason the rug is worth much more than the blue or green rugs.

animals blue red green tiny merchant

17. Which game do I prefer?

Second only to tennis, in my opinion, is the game of golf. Both games require more skill of hand and quickness of movement and eye than card games or checkers.

tennis golf card games checkers games

18. How to I feel?

The angry rhinoceros came so close that I could hear the huge beast snort. I reached for my automatic rifle, although I well knew that my bullets would have little effect on his tough hide. Terrified, I watched him advance toward me.

angry huge well little terrified

19. Whom did Washington praise?

During the hardships of the Revolutionary War, everyone – young and old, soldiers, farmers and artisans – all worked arduously for their country. Washington frequently commended especially the patriotism and devotion of the women. They worked as tirelessly as the soldiers on the battlefields, but with other implements than firearms.

soldiers women farmers artisans patriotism

20. What means of transpiration seemed peculiar to Mr. Jones?

For thirty years Mr. Jones lived in a country where the dog-team was the sole means of transportation. Accustomed as he was to the sled or travois, he found it difficult, on his return to civilization, to refrain from gaping wide-eyed in wonder at the automobiles of our modern city streets.

dog-team sled automobiles street travois

21. What is the most economical type of locomotive?

Engineers strive to reduce the weight of engines and thereby lessen the pounding of the driving wheels against the iron rails at high speeds. Less pounding means longer wear, both for locomotives and tracks. The new streamline trains are usually made from aluminum and are both lighter and easier to pull than the old-type steel locomotives.

steel aluminum iron wood old-type

22. Who may submit entries to the contest?

The committee of judges will give careful attention to every entry submitted. The entrants would type the manuscripts on only one side of the paper. Any magazine reader is eligible to compete. The contest is closed to relatives of the judges or employees of the company.

committee members employees judges judges' relatives magazine readers

23. Future buyers of airplanes may expect a reduction in what?

Airplanes are rapidly being improved to increase speed and safety. In fact, each new plane built is out of date soon after delivery to the purchaser. Eventually, when the experimental stage in aviation has been passed, airplanes will be standardized and produced at a considerable lower price than at present.

delivery lower speed safety price aviation airplanes

24. What do vocational tests measure?

Tests for vocational guidance are effective tools in helping high school students select suitable occupations. The counselor explains to the student that the tests cannot dictate his future vocation in absolute terms, but rather point out his aptitudes and abilities. He may then make a more intelligent and successful occupational choice than would be possible otherwise.

occupations absolute terms aptitudes counselor guidance

25. What kind of abstracts appear in "Biological Abstracts"?

"Biological Abstracts" is a scientific journal consisting of extremely condensed summaries (or abstracts) of current scientific, biological literature. Biology, however, is such an extensive field that the abstracts, if published in one volume, would be expensive and bulky. They are, therefore, divided into five volumes dealing with specialized topics within the general biological field, each of which may be purchased independently.

extensive widespread expensive condensed bulky volume

26. What should citizens do in reading news items?

A newspaper becomes an organ of propaganda when subversive influences are allowed to invade the field of reporting events. Citizens should be trained to evaluate each news item in terms of its authenticity, and to expand unmitigated efforts in denouncing newspapers which flagrantly violate veracity in efforts to influence political conduct.

evaluate denounce violate invade influence veracity

27. What partially overcomes the limits of human perception?

There are limits of exactness in human perception which are irremedial. As two lines or forms are made more nearly equal, a point is reached at which the unaided eye can no longer distinguish between them. To eliminate this source of error in observation, precision instruments have been devised which permit greater accuracy of measurement than could be obtained otherwise.

observation instruments exactness accuracy irremedial forms

28. What makes diagnosis of fatigue difficult?

Depression, inattention and erratic behavior may result from fatigue. In any consideration of fatigue, the capacity of the human being to compensate temporarily by special effort should be remembered. This capacity not infrequently produces remarkable results and may be correspondingly misleading. Interpretation of fatigue is impossible, even when aggravated, unless this capacity is controlled or eliminated.

compensation capacity results fatigue aggravated eliminated depression

Answer Sheet 7 Minute Reading Test

- | | |
|-------------|----------------------|
| 1. Ball | 15. yesterday |
| 2. Father | 16. red |
| 3. Brother | 17. tennis |
| 4. penny | 18. terrified |
| 5. Betty | 19. women |
| 6. old doll | 20. automobiles |
| 7. hay | 21. aluminum |
| 8. six | 22. magazine readers |
| 9. to hurry | 23. price |
| 10. store | 24. aptitudes |
| 11. weak | 25. condensed |
| 12. bank | 26. evaluate |
| 13. Friday | 27. instruments |
| 14. clay | 28. capacity |

CORRECT/RDG. LEVEL

0	1.0
1	1.3
2	1.5
3	1.7
4	2.0
5	2.3
6	2.8
7	3.2
8	3.6
9	3.8
10	4.2
11	4.5
12	5.0
13	5.5
14	6.0

CORRECT/RDG. LEVEL

15	6.5
16	7.0
17	7.5
18	8.0
19	8.3
20	8.6
21	9.0
22	9.3
23	9.7
24	10.0
25	10.5
26	11.0
27	11.5
28	12.0

NUMBER OF CORRECT ANSWERS = _____

Reading Diagnostic Answer Sheet

Print Full Name _____

Student ID # _____

Circle the correct answer. If you make an error, make an **X** over the incorrect and circle the correct answer.

1. boy ball doll Peter
2. Jane car Mother Father
3. Baby cat likes Brother
4. grass nickel penny man
5. Molly name Betty child
6. two dolls old doll new doll little girl
7. horses corn hay ducks
8. ten twelve six eight
9. see Grandma to see to hurry to be late
10. church Saturday store father every day
11. weak little warm barnyard house
12. bank library school today John
13. Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday
14. colors wood leather clay dots and stripes
15. yesterday Tuesday morning in the park in the forest about a mile
16. animals blue red green tiny merchant
17. tennis golf card games checkers games
18. angry huge well little terrified
19. soldiers women farmers artisans patriotism
20. dog-team sled automobiles street travels
21. steel aluminum iron wood old-type

22. committee members employees judges judges' relatives magazine readers

Print Full Name _____

Student ID # _____

23. delivery lower speed safety price aviation airplanes

24. occupations absolute terms aptitudes counselor guidance

25. extensive widespread expensive condensed bulky volume

26. evaluate denounce violate invade influence veracity

27. observation instruments exactness accuracy forms

28. compensation capacity results fatigue aggravated depression

APPENDIX I

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION TEMPLATE

Teacher:		Class Period:	
Date:		Time:	
Number of students:		Location:	
Observation Questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do secondary English language arts teachers select and infuse strategy instruction into their ongoing practices? 2. How do students and teachers respond to the use of strategy instruction in their freshman English classes? 			
Observed Activities			
Pre-Reading Strategies	During Reading Strategies	Post-Reading Strategies	
_____Scaffolding	_____Predicting	_____Paraphrasing	
_____Connecting _____Prior Knowledge	_____Self- Questioning	_____Graphic Organizers	
_____Semantic Mapping	_____Clarifying Questions	_____Writing Extension	
_____Other	_____Other	_____Other	
Descriptive Notes		Reflective Notes	

APPENDIX J

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

To: Mary Roe
FAB S301C

for **From:** Mark Roosa, Chair *SM*
Soc Beh IRB

Date: 08/30/2012

Committee Action: Exemption Granted

IRB Action Date: 08/30/2012

IRB Protocol #: 1208008155

Study Title: Building Literacy Strategies in a Freshman English Classroom

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(1).

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jeffrey Williams was born November 29, 1978 in Tacoma, Washington. He moved with his family to Arizona in 1989 and attended middle and high school in the suburbs east of Phoenix. In 1997, Jeffrey enrolled at the University of Arizona in Tucson, majoring in English literature & linguistics and journalism. After graduating in December of 2000, Jeffrey completed his post-baccalaureate teaching certification and began teaching in the Phoenix area in the fall of 2002. In 2006, Jeffrey pursued an opportunity to attend Hunter College of the City University of New York. He moved to New York City and taught in a public high school in the borough of Queens while completing his master's degree in TESOL (Teaching English to Students of Other Languages). Jeffrey returned to Phoenix in 2009 and began his doctoral studies in leadership and innovation at Arizona State University in 2010. Jeffrey was a presenter at the Association of Literacy Educators and Researchers conference in 2012 and was also a student member of the International Reading Association.